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JASMINE





One backward glance she cast

JASMINE

A Story of Present Day Persia

By

ANNA RATZESBERGER

Author of

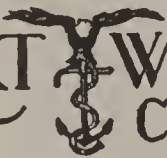
Camel Bells, Ali Hassan of Hamadan, etc.



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To My Father



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I

THE GO-BETWEEN ARRANGES A MARRIAGE

THE *vakil* or go-between examined the girl avidly.

“*Beh! beh! beh!* It is a prize, this girl! Firm white flesh, no freckles, no pockmarks. No scalp disease, a fine head of hair. A beautiful face and a plump, graceful figure. What more does Mustapha Khan want in a bride?”

The old woman cackled delightedly as her fingers caressed the bare flesh of the young Persian girl. She could almost feel the great silver coins that were to be

hers when she carried her report to the mother of Mustapha Khan.

Farrukh—The Glorious, her name implied—pulled her gay embroidered blouse over her head and wriggled her arms into its long sleeves, gathered up her pink *chuddur*, the veil which enveloped her from head to toe in its graceful folds, and then respectfully sat back on her heels.

“One thing more!” the old go-between shouted gleefully. “Just one thing more! Mas’udeh Khanoum says her son must have an educated woman, one who can read and quote the poets. A man of his position must have a wife who will be a jewel and a light unto his name.”

“Bring the book,” said Saltanet, and turned to her daughter. A swift look passed between them. “Bring the book, and read the part I like best.”

Farrukh trembled slightly as she opened the volume. She turned her face to the page and began in a soft, musical voice:

*“When Rustem dreads Sohrab’s resistless power,
Well may inferiors fly the trying hour!
The dire suspicion now pervades us all,
Thus, unavenged, shall beauteous Persia fall!
Yet, generous still, avert the lasting shame,
O, still preserve thy country’s glorious fame!”*

“Enough!” cried the go-between, satisfied of the girl’s

ability. She herself could not tell A from B, but she recognized a passage from the *Shah Nameh* when she heard it, and for her that was enough.

Farrukh waited expectantly. The mother held her breath, her fingers twitching nervously beneath the concealing folds of her *chuddur*.

“Can you quote the poets?”

That was easy. Farrukh had heard her brother recite much of the poetry he had learned at school. She began glibly quoting from Firdusi, the Poet of Paradise:

*“He who is blest with Heaven’s grace
Will never want a dwelling-place
And he who bears the curse of fate
Can never change his wretched state.”*

and from Sa’adi, the Nightingale of a Thousand Songs:

*“We give advice in its proper place,
Spending a lifetime in the task.
If it should not touch any one’s ear of desire,
The messenger told his tale; it is enough.”*

and Hafiz, the Sweet Singer of Shiraz:

*“If e’er for me thy love’s sweet garden
A fragrant breath exhale,
My heart, expansive in its joy,
Shall budlike burst its veil.”*

“*Mashallah!* She is as learned as a *mullah*,” the go-

between commented, profoundly impressed by this display of learning. "I shall go to Mas'udeh Khanoum and tell her the little Farrukh is all that she could desire."

Saltanet relaxed in the warmth of a reassuring smile and proffered her guest the water pipe. Farrukh slipped unobtrusively from the room, her stocking feet making no sound on the thick handwoven carpet. She returned presently with a tray of sweets. A servant followed, bearing the steaming samovar, which he placed on the floor before his mistress.

Saltanet filled the tiny glasses and set them in curiously carved metal holders. Farrukh then served the guest, holding the glass with both hands. She was a well-bred girl and knew that the go-between would report to Mas'udeh Khanoum any flaw in her manners.

The old woman helped herself generously to the lump sugar. It would have been unaccustomed luxury for her to stir it with the tiny spoon of filigree silver. But she could not resist her much loved practice of sucking the tea through a lump of sugar held between her teeth.

Now that her business was finished, she became more sociable. She spoke to Saltanet, Farrukh having retired to a remote corner near the door.

"The father of Farrukh, he has been the landlord's agent for many years, has he not?"

"Ever since he was a young man," Saltanet replied proudly, "and his father before him, they have always

been the headman for the village of Tuhistan. Sometimes the landlord lived here in Tuhistan; but when the old Khan died, his son Mustapha Khan left the village. He prefers to live in Hamadan. So my Abdullah has supervision of the village for him. It pleases us greatly that he should desire our daughter as a bride."

Conversation continued, regarding life in Tuhistan and Hamadan. The go-between had been sent from Hamadan to interview the family and therefore knew very little about this village that was tucked away so high in the mountains.

A loud knocking at the gate and the babble of excited voices recalled the old woman with a start.

"It must be Kazim, my son, with the donkey. The journey over the mountain is long and slow. We have to cross a rocky pass, you know, and he wants to get past it before darkness overtakes us. . . . Will you permit me to depart?"

Saltanet urged the woman to remain longer, however, and then Farrukh served the farewell glass of tea. The go-between stealthily slipped a few sweets into her pocket to eat on the long journey, then Saltanet with polite reluctance finally yielded her consent for the departure.

The old woman gathered the folds of her black street veil closely about her and carefully concealed her face.

"God protect you," she said, as she stood in the doorway.

"Upon my eyes, your coming has brought happiness," Saltanet responded, placing her fingers above her eyebrows.

"God protect you," Farrukh murmured, bowing respectfully.

"*Bismillah!* In the name of God!" Kazim muttered, as he lifted the old woman onto the donkey. Then he prodded it with a stick and it dashed out the gateway, while the gatekeeper and his legion of ragged, bare-legged children shouted cordially,

"God protect you! God go with you!"

Mother and daughter drew a long breath.





II

JASMINE

An air of contentment pervaded the garden. The brilliant Persian sunshine glinted through quivering poplar leaves and gently touched the nodding heads of rose, petunia, and marigold. Frolicking goldfish splashed in the pool, while honey bees hummed their madrigal in the trellis of jasmine.

A fine handwoven rug was spread on the ground beneath the almond tree and on it were set out a shining

brass samovar, the steaming teapot, and a tray of cucumbers.

Mas'udeh Khanoum had laid aside her veil in the privacy of the garden and appeared in the usual feminine costume—brightly embroidered loose blouse with close fitting neck and long sleeves; a very short, closely plaited ballet skirt; and long, black trousers. A fine, white lace veil held in her long braids of henna-tinted hair. Her hands were carefully groomed and the long oval nails stained with henna. A great blue turquoise gleamed in the wedding ring on her left hand. She was a lady.

At the other end of the rug Mustapha Khan sat on his heels, peeling a cucumber. In appearance he resembled most of the young men of his acquaintance with his straight black hair, dark brown eyes, neatly clipped moustache, and well-made Western clothes. He was, very properly, wearing the Pahlevi hat, a straight-sided round hat with narrow military bill; for no orthodox Moslem would think of going about with his head uncovered, and since the accession of the new king, Reza Shah, no Persian except by special permit could wear the ancient turban or brimless felt cap of the former dynasty.

Mas'udeh Khanoum poured her son another glass of tea and dropped a jasmine petal into its amber depths. For a moment the fragrant, fragile thing spun gently on the surface. Then it slowly sank to the bottom of the glass.

"It will be like that," she told the young man, as she pointed a slender finger.

"Like the jasmine! She is beautiful and sweet. And you will live in a giddy dream for a time. But that will soon pass, she will become commonplace, and you will go about your affairs as before. We women are always relegated to the background. There is no happy companionship for us. A bride is in the sunshine for a few days, and then forever in the shadow.

"And again it is said, 'Woman is a calamity, but no house ought to be without this evil.' But it shall not be so with me," the young man protested vehemently. "When I had my schooling in *feranghistan*, the foreign lands, I saw young women in the school who were charming and intelligent. Sometimes I was a guest in the professors' homes and met their wives and daughters. Those women wore no veils, even in my presence. They laughed and talked with me, quoted from their illustrious writers, and expressed their own ideas about affairs in their country. It was stimulating to be among such women. That is the reason I want a wife who can read fluently and quote the writings of our great poets, who can read and think and play and be a companion. I don't want an old-fashioned, insipid creature."

"*Mashallah!* Then you will need a haremful. You will not find all those virtues in one woman."

"But the *vakil* told you our *kadkhoda's* daughter in Tuhistan was just such a one. I am satisfied with the

report. Let us proceed with the wedding as soon as a favorable date can be arranged."

"As you wish," the mother replied indulgently. Mustapha was a good son, enterprising and upright, albeit a trifle spoiled by some of the impractical ideas he had absorbed from the foreign school in Hamadan and the law school in Paris. Other sons and daughters had married and moved to other villages which they had inherited from the father's estate. Only Mustapha remained at home, collecting rents and tariffs from his own village of Tuhistan and practising his profession of legal aide to the governor of the province.

An hour later, at sunset, the eager bridegroom summoned a carriage and rode down to the bazaar to see his city agent.

"Go to Agha Reza, who lives in my garden on the Street of The Mulberry Trees," he said. "Tell him that I wish to occupy the place myself this autumn and that he must be ready to move in three months."

"*Chash'm!* By my eyes!" the agent replied. "But what of the contract? Agha Reza can demand the right to remain until New Year's. His contract says as much."

"You speak truly," Mustapha Khan conceded. He was a lawyer and knew the law, but he also knew human nature. "He has the right, but he can be persuaded. Offer him a 'present'—twenty or thirty *tomans*; or, better still, I will send him a rug. I prefer to keep his goodwill."

"It shall be done," the agent assured him. "Besides, when all the workmen begin to come into the garden to repair the water-courses and the house, he will take his wife and daughters away in a hurry."

Mustapha Khan frowned.

"It was the poet Sa'adi who said, 'It is not every arm in which there is strength that can wrench the hand of a weak man. Bring not affliction upon the hearts of the feeble, lest thou may'st fall under the lash of the strong'," he reminded his agent.

They remained in conversation for a time, the young landlord giving instructions about repairs and alterations which he desired to have made in the garden.

On the homeward way he heard a *mullah* in the minaret calling the Faithful to their prayers:

"La Allah illal-liha Mohammed Rassoulallah."

"Allah is great; there is no God but Allah; Mohammed is His Prophet."

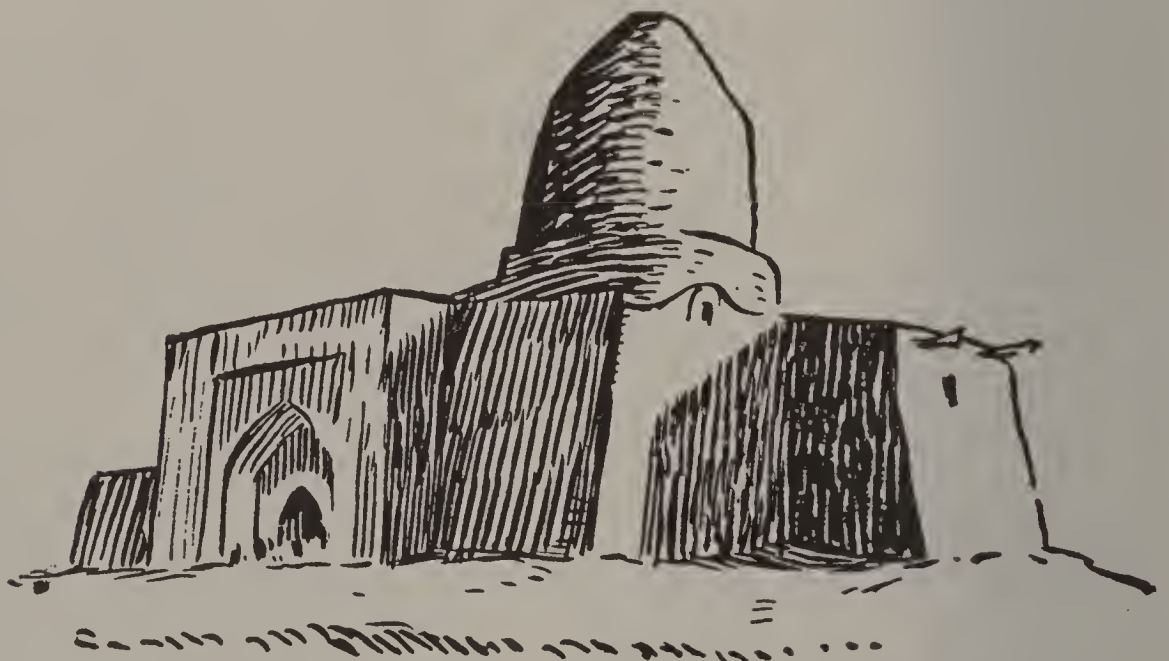
"Come to prayer; come to prayer."

He cast an idle glance into the arched windows of the mosque, where the paper had peeled off the little wooden pane frames. A swinging lamp of pierced brass shed its dim light through the vast hall, bare save for the graceful columns that supported the arches, and the straw matting that covered the floor. On a shallow platform a few steps above his hearers, who squatted on the matting, stood the *mullah*. His white turban appeared startingly distinct in the semi-twilight, while the long,

loose folds of his brown camelhair robe were lost in the shadows.

With the *mullah*, the true Believers were reciting the prayers of Mohammed, their voices blending in the sweet, rhythmic intonations.

As Mustapha Khan listened, a feeling of peace came over him. He had an assured income, an enviable post with the governor, and now he was about to take a beautiful bride—one versed in all the great poets of Persia. No fly was in his ointment.





III

THE WEDDING

It was midsummer. The village and mountainside lay parched and brown beneath a cloudless sky of deepest turquoise. The grapes were filling out and would be ready to harvest in another month. Men watched their vineyards with a jealous eye.

The heavy iron knocker on the gate of Abdullah, the village headman, beat a continuous tattoo. Black veiled figures slipped into the garden and, recognizing each

other in some mysterious manner, chatted gaily as they walked up the gravel path to the house.

"So you too are coming to Farrukh's *shirinee* party!" The occasion was more to celebrate than to announce the engagement.

"Yes, of course! And isn't Farrukh a lucky girl to marry the Khan!"

"She is of common blood like the rest of us. I don't see why Mustapha Khan chose her instead of one of us."

"They say it was because she could read so well and recite poetry."

"Farrukh read! That is news to me. But then perhaps she has been having lessons with a *mirza*."

The girls had reached the verandah. Deftly they removed their heelless slippers.

"*Salaam-n-aleikum*. Peace be to you!" they greeted their hostess ceremoniously.

"May you be blessed!"

"May you be the mother of a hundred sons!"

Farrukh received these felicitations shyly and led the newcomers to a position in the room appropriate to their station in society. Here they sat down on the fine handwoven rugs and let their black silk veils slip to the floor. Then they leisurely looked about the room.

Three walls were unbroken, except for a door and the usual *taqchehs*, or niches, slightly sunken into the thick wall to hold samovars, lamps, and velvet squares embroidered with bright silk thread and seed pearls. The

fourth wall faced the garden. All the windows had been swung open. Only the fanlight above each remained closed, and the faint light that filtered through the tiny panes of red and blue glass lent color to an already vivid scene.

No men were present in this gathering, so maid and matron alike uncovered their faces and were glad of a chance to lay aside the long sombre street veils and display their lovely party clothes. A Persian girl has so few occasions for wearing her prettiest garments that she must make the most of each opportunity.

All the guests wore long black sateen trousers. Their high-necked, long-sleeved, loose blouses and short, full-plaited ballet skirts were of white cotton gaily embroidered and adorned with sequins, or fashioned of silks and satins and chiffon, of pink and blue and mauve and cerise. Dozens of delicate silver spangled bracelets jingled to the accompaniment of soft voices. Dark eyes rested with satisfaction or envy on turquoise rings. Glossy heads nodded, aware of the gleam of swaying earrings. Necklaces of imitation gold coin lent the final touch of festivity to the scene.

On this important occasion the servants remained in the background and Farrukh herself served the guests. Her mother filled the tea glasses from the shining brass samovar and Farrukh carried them singly to her friends, ceremoniously holding the glass with both hands. Had she used but one hand, the guest would have been of-

fended by her rudeness, for she would then have been giving but half her attention to the task.

"May your hand never pain you!" they murmured sweetly, as she placed before them syrupy *sherbat*, hard little cakes, jellied candies, nuts and squash seeds, and fresh apricots.

No one noticed—so interested was everyone in the bright costumes and sparkling chatter of wedding plans—that the sky had become overcast with the first clouds since April. Suddenly a spatter of raindrops startled everyone, and the servants stumbled over each other in their haste to bring the assembled shoes in from the verandah.

"It is The Washing of The Grapes," they exclaimed joyfully. The only rain of the long golden summer lasted but a few minutes and served merely to wash the dust from the grapes in the vineyard, and perhaps lay the suffocating street dust momentarily.

Farrukh's mother now spoke.

"It has been agreed that the marriage should take place during the first full moon after The Washing of the Grapes. So Farrukh will soon be gone from us."

Soon indeed! How fast those last days sped! And now the day of preparation had come. With a few close friends, Farrukh spent the last day in the public bath. Here she received the customary treatment by a trained attendant. In a dim steam room she was bathed—first with a soapy clay to remove the old, dead skin and with

a coarse stone to rub the callouses from her feet; and then with a fine lathery soap. Bucketfuls of hot water were thrown over her from time to time and finally a shower of cold.

Farrukh emerged sputtering but glowing in every inch of her firm young flesh. Then she went to the next room to a long pool of warm water and submerged herself three times, for spiritual as well as physical purification, according to the holy Koran.

To receive the special bridal treatment she returned to her friends in the outer room. Here she reclined on a mat and was rubbed gently with ointment and musky perfumes. Her finger nails and toe nails were carefully stained with henna, and a heavy black eyebrow pencil used to trace a continuous line between the two natural eyebrows. Finally, the attendant skillfully brushed gilt paint over her hair and pronounced her the most beautiful bride she had ever seen.

"Very beautiful! As lovely as a rose of Shiraz!" chimed in the friends, who had been sitting nearby on the floor, smoking the water pipe, drinking tea, and eating melon and squash seeds.

The wedding day dawned warm and cloudless. The old Shaikh-ul-Islam, chief priest of the great Friday Mosque in Hamadan, arranged the folds of his best white turban with the greatest precision and strode forth to the home of Mustapha Khan. In his most impressive

manner he charged the young man to enumerate truthfully the presents he had given his bride.

Mustapha Khan began :

“Three rugs from Kashan, one trunkful of fine Kashmir shawls, four silk house *chuddurs* and two black street *chuddurs*, as well as the entire wedding costume, and—and a little white donkey.”

“A little white donkey!” the *mullah* exclaimed, surprised out of his dignity by the mention of a thing so incongruous with these other costly and beautiful objects.

“A little white donkey,” Mustapha Khan repeated almost apologetically, “so that Farrukh may ride to Tuhistan whenever she wishes.”

This bare recital of gifts comprised the bridegroom’s part in the marriage ceremony. He gave the *mullah* a generous fee and remained at home to await the coming of his bride.

The priest set out for Tuhistan. In the bride’s home the ceremony was completed.

“Has anyone forced you into this marriage?”

“No.”

“Are you willing to marry this man?”

“Yes.”

“What gifts have you received from him?”

“My wedding costume, four silk house *chuddurs* and two street *chuddurs*, a trunkful of Kashmir shawls, three Kashan rugs, and a donkey.”

“What have you given him?”

“His wedding suit, a rug which I myself wove, and a fine Ispahan water pipe.”

The *mullah*, in his legal capacity, then turned to the father and wrote out in fine Arabic script the dowry agreement—the sum of money which Mustapha Khan was to receive from Abdullah and which he would forfeit if he divorced Farrukh.

The act was finished. Farrukh and Mustapha Khan were man and wife, though neither had spoken a word to the other, nor seen the other's face.

Contrary to frequent practice, the wedding celebration was held without delay. A hundred guests filled Abdullah's garden, drank tea, and ate of the fluffy rice and stewed chicken. And in the midst of all, an orchestra filled the air with rhythmic excitement. Four drums and one long stringed *tar* made weird wedding music and a tenor from time to time sang humorous folk songs.

After nightfall men and women gathered in separate apartments and continued their pleasure. A dancer from the tea house performed in the center of the room to the accompaniment of two small drums and a tambourine. Far into the night could be heard the rhythmic beating of the festal drums.

Three days and nights the festivities lasted. Then the bride made ready for her departure. Immediately great crowds collected in the walled, crooked streets to watch the procession. Farrukh's father and eldest brother held a small Koran between them and raised

their arms high to form an arch for her to pass under as she walked through the gateway. This act symbolized the giving of the paternal blessing.

Before her walked an old family servant, facing backward so that the large oblong mirror which he carried would reflect light on the bride and make her way bright through life. Down the street they passed, the mirror-bearer, the bride, the guests, and then all the curious hangers-on who could wedge themselves within the confines of the high mud walls of the street. Last of all came a caravan of mules and donkeys with the bride's possessions—small trunkfuls of clothing and shawls, rugs, pillows, fine new bedding, and a saddlebag containing her beauty box and jewelry.

Farrukh rode in a carriage as far as the first tea house outside the village. Then she climbed on her own little white donkey, while her maidservant mounted another, and the two women jogged along behind the string of mules which her father's servant led over the mountain, across the dangerous ice fields, and down the slopes of the foothills into the city of Hamadan.

One backward glance she cast toward the frowning bare mountain known as *Yakh Chal*, the Ice Wells, which separated her from the old home. One glance and then she saw a most inspiring sight. Close to the *Yakh Chal* another majestic peak rose against the turquoise sky. Along its top the rugged lines of rock streamed in mighty sculptural outline of a Moslem

woman bowed in prayer, her black robe falling round her.

“Always,” thought Farrukh, “I shall have that figure to look to, for strength and patience. Always I can see Elvend, the lovely mountain.”

They had reached the city gate. The mule driver produced the police *jevaz*, which permitted them to journey from one town to another, and presented it to the inspector. They were allowed to continue into the city. Now and then the servant asked the way to The Street of The Mulberry Trees and soon they were winding their way through the narrow, crooked street.

The little caravan stopped before an imposing gate. No need to strike the heavy iron knocker fashioned so cunningly like a human hand, for on the thick wall above stood the bridegroom. As the ponderous walnut doors swung open, Farrukh passed through the entrance to her new home, literally “beneath her husband’s feet,” as the little ceremony implied.





IV

A BRIDE AT HOME

Farrukh and Mustapha Khan sat on the floor leisurely eating breakfast—"morning tea" they called it—for the meal consisted only of tea and a large round sheet of thin, crisp bread.

"And what shall my little *Yesmeh* do today?" Mustapha playfully asked his bride.

"Why do you call me *Yesmeh* when you know my name is Farrukh?" the girl asked in perplexity.

Her husband laughed outright.

"*Yesmeh*, a Jasmine! My mother said you would be like the jasmine flower in my tea glass. For a while you would thrill my senses, and then I should become so accustomed to your presence that I would pay no more attention to you.

"But it shall not be so, Little Jasmine! Every day you will charm me with your beauty and your sweet voice. Read to me now!"

He laid before her a small volume, *The Gulistan*, its creamy pages covered with heavy, flowing Arabic script, with here and there a page delicately illuminated in red and gold and azure.

Farrukh blanched. Would she so soon be found out and divorced for deception? Her eyes widened in fear.

The man mistook her expression for timidity.

"Come, Farrukh! The go-between told us you could read like a *mullah*. Do not be ashamed of your accomplishment. It is not every woman who can read *The Gulistan*."

"The *Shah Nameh*!" she gulped in terror. "The *Shah Nameh* I read for her; I cannot read *The Gulistan*."

Still uncomprehending, he laid the *Shah Nameh* in her hands.

Farrukh began in a small voice:

*"When Rustem dreads Sohrab's resistless power
Well may inferiors . . ."*

"But you do not see those words!" Mustapha Khan

cried in amazement, and the truth rushed upon him with a shock.

“So you have lied to me! And I am now the laughing stock of all Tuhistan! My face is black! Now must I eat shame, because a mere woman has made a fool of me! Why, I can divorce you for this! You with your pretty flower-face and a mind that contains nothing more than the tricks of deception! Bah!”

The outraged young husband strode from the room in a mighty anger, descended the steep stone stairs to the garden, and disappeared into the street without a glance toward the miserable girl who crouched trembling behind the samovar.

Over the cobblestones he stumbled along. Beggars and unclean dogs and women passed unnoticed. A string of rug-laden camels would have knocked him down but for the frenzied warning of the driver.

In his office he carried out his duties in a daze, not returning home for lunch or tea or even the evening meal, but satisfying his wants at a public tea house by the river. Until a late hour he sat in the tea garden smoking a water pipe, wrapped in bitter thought and utterly oblivious of brazen, black-veiled figures that casually brushed against his arm.

It was nearly midnight when he roused the gatekeeper, who came out like a ghost in his white sleeping garments to unbolt the gate.

He went at once to his wife's apartment. There he

found her, crumpled in sleep against a large cushion on the floor. She had arrayed herself in all her wedding finery, in rich jewels and attar of roses, hoping to please her lord. Exhausted by the long hours of terror—he had not beaten her, so she knew her punishment would be even more severe—she had at last fallen asleep and did not know that even now he stood before her. So she could not see his mood soften almost imperceptibly to one of pity.

“After all,” he confessed to himself, “she is only a child, only sixteen. It was for the security of her whole future that she gambled. My father would have turned her out, divorced her in a moment for such deception. That was the old-fashioned way. But I shall do differently. For her sake it is perhaps fortunate that I hold to some of the foolish foreign notions which my mother ridicules. I shall solve my own problem the modern way.”

Mustapha Khan unrolled the bundle of bedding which masked as a wall cushion by day, and stretched himself out for a few hours of fitful sleep, without disturbing his wife.

Morning light streamed cheerfully into the room and flashed back from the wedding mirror which hung on the wall. Mustapha Khan went up to the flat roof and joined his voice to the chorus that was singing the morning call to prayer:

*"Allah is great; there is no God but Allah;
Mohammed is His prophet.*

Come to prayer; come to prayer.

Prayer is better than sleep.

*"Allah is great; there is no God but Allah;
Mohammed is His prophet.*

Come to prayer; come to prayer."

When he came down, he found Farrukh sitting by the samovar, ready to serve his tea. She had smoothed out her wrinkled garments and smiled at him timidly.

"Farrukh," he said gently, and he prided himself on adopting this very Western attitude.

"Yes, my lord."

"Do not be afraid of me; I shall not divorce you. It is yourself you have wronged, not me. The poet says, 'To tell a falsehood is like the cut of a sabre; for, though the wound may heal, the scar of it will remain.' But do not try to deceive me again; another time I may not be so lenient.

"And now listen carefully to what I say. Undoubtedly, you have a quick mind, else you could not have recited the poetry so easily. So, when I go through the bazaar today, I shall talk with Mirza Hassan and if possible arrange for him to give you reading lessons each day."

“Oh, my lord! You are merciful to me, a miserable undeserving creature. But you shall see my gratitude. I will study until I know all the poets, until I can write a fair hand, and recite many proverbs.”

Relief from the terror of divorce brought a glow to her face and a lilt to her voice. She was as one snatched back from death. The young husband left the garden a much happier man and Farrukh turned to her household tasks with a light heart.

First came Mahmud, the gatekeeper, who bought the food supplies in the city bazaar. As a bride, Farrukh had brought with her a supply of bread from the village. Anyone in Tuhistan would say that village bread was better than that which was to be had in the city. And when Farrukh's supply from the village was gone, she would have her maidservant make it there at home—round, crisp sheets of whole wheat bread baked on hot stones in an underground oven.

“Spinach and eggs and a cone of sugar,” Farrukh almost sang the list. “Be sure the spinach is young and tender. And, Mahmud, see if you can find some sweet Shiraz grapes.”

“Yes, *khanoum*, I am sure I can get Shiraz grapes. Yesterday I saw them in the bazaar, a penny for a hatful,” Mahmud informed her with alacrity. He would get a basketful and keep out some for his children at the gate. With quick steps he pattered down the path and out of the garden.

The *kulfat* or maidservant, she whom Farrukh had brought from the old home, came next, her faded blue calico robe gathered up to her waist and tied in a knot at the back. She was barefoot and wriggled her strong brown toes in the rich nap of the rug as she listened to her mistress.

"When you have washed our breakfast dishes in the pool, polish the samovar well. Then sweep the rugs in all the rooms. When that is finished, carry the grinding stones outdoors and grind a supply of salt. Put it in the big blue Lalaine jar when it is ready."

"Yes, *khanoum*," the *kulfat* responded. "But it may take most of the day. These stones are not so good as those we had in Tuhistan."

Farrukh smiled kindly at her homesick maidservant and agreed with her. Then she turned to her own task of rolling the bedding into compact bundles, setting them against the wall for leaning cushions, and covering them with embroidered velvet squares. This small task concluded, she walked into the garden and wandered about aimlessly.

Almond trees shaded the garden, while long straight rows of slender poplars marched along the margin of the water courses. All the common garden flowers clustered in profusion in formal beds, the center of the whole scheme being a shallow, stone-lined pool through which the water flowed unceasingly. Here the *kulfat* washed the dishes, the clothes, and the vegetables, and fright-

ened the placid goldfish who much preferred the silent reflection of the flowers to these frequent scenes of turmoil.

The house was built against the high mud wall which marked one end of the garden. A series of storerooms occupied the ground floor. The dwelling rooms were all above and were reached by prodigiously steep stone stairs. At one side of the stairway on the ground floor was a spacious room not enclosed like the adjacent store-rooms. Its walls were finished with light blue plaster and its floor laid with slabs of stone. In the center of the room a splashing cascade of water descended over rough-hewn blocks of stone, lingered in a tiny stone-lined declivity, and then flowed into the brimming pool which lay in the garden sunlight.

On either side of the cascade were crude wooden benches covered with small rugs. Here anyone might come with his tea glass, a cucumber, or water pipe, and recline on the wooden couch to seek relief in this dim spot from the glittering sunshine and to be refreshed by the water-cooled air and suggestive splashing on the rocks.

Each afternoon Farrukh dressed herself with particular care, arranged her silken house *chuddur* gracefully, and bade the maidservant prepare plenty of tea and cakes and melon seeds. Mustapha's mother had made an early call on her son's wife and, pleased with the girl's quiet charm and correct manners, had brought her

friends to call. These in turn had brought other friends, so that in a very short time Farrukh found herself in the midst of a wide circle of acquaintances. They came to her home and drank tea, smoked the water pipe, and gossiped; she returned the calls, drank their tea, and contributed her bits of household gossip.

Her mornings were spent with the *mirza*, two hours of laborious puzzling over the crooked Arabic figures, repeating poetic epigrams, and making smudgy efforts to write the alphabet with a split-reed pen. Then came the reward at noon, when Mustapha came home for lunch and praised her for her aptitude.

“Remember!” he would warn her in jest. “If you do not learn to read, you will be Jasmine and not Farrukh to me.”

But Farrukh took his words seriously and in a short time was able to read the simple phrases in her primer. When she had mastered several stories in *The Gulistan*, she opened the book and read to him triumphantly.

“‘Patience accomplishes its object,’” she read, “‘while hurry speeds to its ruin. With my own eyes I saw in the desert that the deliberate man outstripped him that had hurried on. The wing-footed steed is broken down in his speed, whilst the camel-driver jogs on with his beast to the end of his journey.’”

“*Mashallah!* That is indeed fine,” he exclaimed in genuine enthusiasm.

Farrukh took instant advantage of his mood.

"I have a petition to make," she announced.

"Go ahead; say it," he invited her genially.

"It is this," the young wife explained. "I should like to set up a loom and supervise some weavers in the making of rugs. Other women have their weaving rooms and I too should like to try it. My mother instructed me in weaving—you remember the rug I wove and gave to you as a wedding present—so I think I could supervise the work satisfactorily. It would be another interest to fill my days."

"And where would you have this rug factory?"

"There is an empty room across the path from the gatehouse. I have measured it. We can set up two looms for the *dozari*, the two meter size, and still have a little space left."

"Yes, I think it can be arranged," Mustapha agreed, and with youthful enterprise immediately set about securing a man to build the looms. In spite of his enthusiasm for the modern mode, he failed to realize that in this undertaking he was encouraging his wife in one of the oldest occupations for Persian women.

Farrukh conferred with her husband's mother, who at first was skeptical of the ability of the young girl. However, she gave her advice about buying wool and having it carded and dyed, told her where she could hire a draftsman to copy patterns, and assured her that weavers by the score would flock to her gate when they learned that work was to be had.

At length Farrukh found a skillful woman who would set up the warp threads whenever she was needed, two master weavers, and four little girls who had just learned the knack of tying knots and would be willing to work from sunrise to sunset for only a few cents.

"What is your name?" she asked one of the children, as she visited the looms one day.

"I am Osra," the child replied. "My father is Abbas."

"And what does he do? Does he work in the bazaar?"

"I don't know what he does," the child answered. "Sometimes he just sits in the tea house and talks with a man from the South, and sometimes he goes on long journeys."

Farrukh had smelled the sweetish odor of opium on the child's father when he brought her to the garden the first day.

"He is probably an opium smoker," she told herself, "but I hope the child doesn't use it, too."

She spoke to her husband about the matter.

"Everything that is round is not a walnut," he reminded her. "And everyone who smells of opium may not be a smoker. So do not eat trouble that is not set before you."

"But come! Fetch my water pipe and I will tell you of the tax collector's visit today. I believe he has his eye on me, and it isn't the Evil Eye!"



V

THE END OF THE WORLD AND AFTERWARD

The end of the world was at hand. So said the simple folk who had heard someone announce in the mosque that there would be an eclipse of the moon that night. They had gone to their homes with the idea that a dragon was to devour the moon and that it would bring the end of the world unless it could be driven off before it accomplished its destruction.

Farrukh, too, shared this superstition and all Mus-

tapha Khan's attempts to explain the cause of the eclipse failed to shake her belief in the dragon. For had she not gone out year after year with her family to join the other villagers on the common and help make a great noise which would frighten the dragon away from the moon? And had they not always been successful?

In the face of her husband's ridicule, she dared not join the community effort to drive off the dragon that night, but she urged the maidservant to attend and to exert herself doubly in the common cause.

Three hours past sunset little groups began to gather in the *maidons* where several crooked streets met, there to wait for the dragon. Fearfully they stepped over broken gravestones that cluttered the common. Here and there a brave soul ventured a half-hearted jest that drew forth only forced laughs. Brass trays and copper basins held tight against black figures reflected the eerie white moonshine. Little boys boastfully measured the length of their stout sticks.

Then the dragon was upon them. With slow, sinister progress, it spread its shadow across the lambent moon. At first it took only a chip from the rim of the bright saucer; then, a great greedy bite.

Frightened by the progress of destruction, the townspeople attacked their pots and pans with frenzied energy. The resultant clangor and confusion could be heard far up the sides of the old Musallah hill and across the sleeping plain. Indeed, it could be heard to the very

moon itself. For the dragon, terrified by this violent demonstration on the planet Earth, retreated disgracefully from the field and disappeared somewhere in the sable, starless Beyond, while the effulgent moon smiled down in gratitude upon her deliverers.

Disaster was averted; the Judgment Day was not yet. Joyous in their continued victory in these periodic ordeals, the relieved townspeople jostled their way homeward through the narrow walled streets. Mischievous little boys struck strange gates with their sticks and then darted behind the black robes of mother or sister. Tired women complained of the heavy trays and basins which so lately had saved their lives.

"*Mashallah!*" they said to one another. "This struggle is never finished. Almost every year we must frighten the dragon away, and still it comes back again!"

They were in the Street of The Mulberry Trees, and the maidservant Shokat, stopping at her own great gate, offered advice as she waited for the gatekeeper to unbolt the door.

"You should get stout sticks such as we have in Tuhistan," she said. "Our people can make more noise than you Hamadanis; we frighten away the dragon in one minute! In one minute!"

The gate banged shut. The *kulfat* was already hastening to the harem to tell her mistress of the evening's victory. But Farrukh was just then unrolling the wall cushions and spreading them into pallets on the floor.

"Tomorrow you shall tell me—tomorrow," she spoke impatiently, having watched the victory in the sky from her own window, and shooed the woman away. Poor *kulfat*! She was so homesick for Tuhistan that she must make Farrukh take the place of family and friends, and she sometimes forgot herself so far as to treat Farrukh as a sister and not as a superior *khanoum*, the wife of an aristocrat.

Tomorrow and many morrows sped the sun in its southward course, and now the Persian housewives busied themselves in preparation for the rigors of a long winter.

"Buy melons," Farrukh would tell the servant Mahmud, "plenty of melons, large sweet *kharbusehs*, and bed them in straw in the storeroom.

"And you," she would then say, turning to the *kulfat*, "you twine the grape clusters into long braids. Mahmud's woman can help you suspend them from a beam in the storeroom. Yes, yes! You may have some purple grapes of Tuhistan. But hang up plenty of the little *kishmish*. We must have plenty of raisins for the rice. And—if it is not too much trouble—do try to preserve a few clusters of *askari* grapes. If you are careful, they will keep until New Year's. They would make a fine present for Mas'udeh Khanoum."

Grapes and melons and squash in the storeroom, festoons of little red peppers in the doorway, shallow baskets of dried apricots and tart prunes in the corner, and

a row of blue jars so tall and broad that they might have harbored Ali Baba and The Forty Thieves had they not already been filled with charcoal, rice, wheat, barley, salt ground fine, squash seeds, and shiny black melon seeds. Here then the *kulfat* had visible proof of her many long hours spent with the grinding stones and the mortar and pestle. Several smaller jars of the same bright Persian blue held carefully ground spices, whole anise seeds, and cardamom.

Farrukh viewed the stores with pride. The snow had not yet come to Hamadan, though it had whitened the Praying Woman of Elvend and was already creeping down the slopes. But when it did descend upon the city, even an unexpected blizzard that blocked the walled streets and shut all men into their snowbound gardens could not discommode Farrukh. She and her household could stand a siege for several days against the Snow King.

“But it is not yet winter,” she told herself cheerfully. “Come, Mahmud! Call a *droshky* and take me to the bazaar. Be sure to bring a basket. I shall purchase many things.”

Mahmud hurried out of the garden and returned presently riding on the high seat with the carriage driver. Farrukh drew her black silk street veil closely about her—one of her wedding presents from Mustapha Khan—and climbed into the gaudily upholstered seat. The big black hood of the carriage discreetly shielded her from

the curious gaze of passersby. At the same time, it prevented her seeing many of the shivering filthy beggars who plied their trade in every strategic corner of the crooked streets.

The cobblestones were exceedingly rough and caused her many a breath-taking jolt. It was with a definite sense of relief that she finally got out and paid off the driver, when the street had become too narrow to permit further passage of the carriage.

Now they entered the covered bazaar. Tiny open shops lined each side of the alley made dim by its roof of arched masonry. The country bride always gazed in open-mouthed amazement at the interminable line of shops. There had been nothing like it in Tuhistan; two or three cloth shops, a cobbler, the vegetable man, the charcoal seller, the harness maker, and one whose cubbyhole held gleaming copper scale-pans and baskets of raisins and nuts.

But in this enchanting bazaar were dozens of cloth shops where eager merchants called out:

“What do you wish, lady? I have it.”

Or again:

“Come on, lady! Just step into my shop. Sit here on the rug while I show you what has just come from the Great Caravanserai—beautiful block prints from Ispahan, exquisite silks from France.”

Farrukh was entranced. She paused. A beggar clawed

her robe—a ragged, deformed, and vermin-infested creature.

“Oh, *khanoum!*” it shrilled. “One penny, just one penny, give me.”

Farrukh mechanically thrust a coin toward the un-human form. Giving alms stored up credit for one in heaven.

Instantly three new voices took up the theme. Mahmud pushed close to his mistress.

“Quick!” he said. “Follow me at once down this turning, or you will have an army of them at your heels.”

She shook off the loathsome hands and scuttled around the corner. Another turn, and another, and they were safe again—for the moment, at least. A devious course at length brought them to the Cobblers’ Lane. Here in the dim light Farrukh paused to watch an old man diligently sewing a shoe. He sat back on his heels and beckoned to the prospective customer.

“What do you wish, lady? I have it.”

“A pair of white heelless slippers with crochet top,” Farrukh explained.

“Yes, yes! I have them,” he cried, waving a needle and thread in the air as he pointed to a neatly arranged stack of shoes.

“Hosseini! Fetch a pair of *givehs* for the lady,” he addressed an alert youngster who was obviously his apprentice. “Small size, of course! Don’t you see that she is a lady?”

Hossein brought forth the slippers. Farrukh sat down on the floor and tried them.

"How much?" she inquired.

The cobbler considered—silk veil, small feet, a servant in attendance.

"Six *kran*s," he announced, a sum of sixty cents.

"Two only," Farrukh replied firmly.

"But, lady! The excellent material, the skillful stitching! I cannot sell for less than five."

"Five *kran*s! No, they are not worth even three *kran*s."

"But they have no flaw. See! I make you a present of them at four *kran*s."

"It would indeed be a present to you if I gave three *kran*s ten *chahis*."

"Very well, lady! Let it be three *kran*s ten."

Farrukh counted out the silver coins.

"Three *kran*s ten," she remarked, as the coins fell into the cobbler's leathery grasp.

"My apprentice, lady! He wishes a present. He assisted in the sale," the cobbler pointed to little Hossein, who already was smiling hopefully.

Farrukh grudgingly produced a *chahi*, a coin of about a half-cent value.

"I am very grateful," the cobbler mumbled.

"May Allah be kind to you!" the apprentice blessed her in gratitude.

Mahmud put the shoes in his basket and waited re-



*The cobbler considered—silk veil, small feet, a servant
in attendance*

spectfully. Farrukh leisurely examined the stock of the next cobbler's shop. Here was a man making *mullah*-slippers. Already he had many pairs stacked against the wall—bright red and yellow and green. Of course, it was the priests of the mosque who usually wore these gay slippers that curled up to a vertical point at the tip and were entirely open along the sides and back, only a narrow sole supporting the heel. But other purchasers, too, found them attractive and often carried home a pair to wear around the garden.

Farrukh felt at once that she must have the bright red pair that the cobbler was even then finishing. Such a vivid red—just the color of pomegranates—and the tip curled back like the crest of a wave! She must have them!

The cobbler looked up.

"The *khanoum* likes my shoes?"

"Perhaps. How much are they?"

"The price is almost nothing—ten *krans* only."

"It is too much," Farrukh replied and turned away.

"Then how much?" parried the cobbler.

"Four *krans*," Mahmud prompted his mistress.

Farrukh finally bought the shoes for six, gave them to Mahmud, and retraced her steps through the tortuous lanes of commerce. Only once did she linger, before the variety shop, where ribbons and buttons and fans, shoestrings and gaudy combs and cheap jewelry dangled from convenient nails in the ceiling and presented them-

selves within easy reach of the proprietor, who sat on the floor in the midst of his merchandise.

The covered bazaar had grown dim and Farrukh realized that she had dallied too long. In the open street once more, she discovered it was past sunset and here and there shopkeepers were already closing the wooden shutters to lock their shops for the night.

A vegetable pushcart rattled past, a tiny castor oil lamp burning feebly among the beets and spinach.

"Have patience!" Mahmud called to the pusher.

The man stopped.

"Fresh vegetables—beets, spinach, onions, and squash," he announced hopefully. "My lamp is lit; I am selling for half price."

A transaction involving five onions and three cents was concluded with very little haggling. The man wanted to sell out and get home before his cart should run over a *jinn* in the dark and that fearsome spirit follow him to the end of his days.

Then Farrukh beheld the orange peddler. On his head he balanced a broad, willow basket piled high with golden fruit.

"Portugal! Portugal! Very sweet!" his strong tenor voice made a song of the fruitful theme. Early Persians believed that their first sweet oranges—in distinction to the bitter ungrafted oranges—had been brought up the Persian Gulf by Portuguese traders.

The necessary coins were counted out, and the oranges

joined the company of onions and slippers in the basket. Mahmud hailed a passing *droshky*, which jolted them rapidly toward the Street of The Mulberry Trees.

It was while Farrukh was gazing upward toward Mt. Elvend, whose snowy peak melted into the pearly sky, that they had the small accident which was later to assume such significance. Another carriage attempted to pass theirs in the narrow street and locked wheels.

Instantly both drivers began to curse.

"Son of a burnt father!" roared the one. "Would you kill me and my horses, and my honorable passengers?"

"May you be stung by a scorpion, but it is your fault!" the other bellowed, and waited for him to climb down and undo the damage.

In the end, it was Mahmud who broke the deadlock. The drivers would have stayed all night to argue the merits, or demerits, of the case rather than admit any responsibility for the deed.

When the woman of Mahmud opened the gate, Mahmud observed that the weavers had already gone home.

"*Khanoum*," he said in sudden remembrance, "do you know who the passengers were in that other *droshky*? I saw them when I climbed down to loose the wheels. The father of Osra, your weaver, and—"

As he whispered the name, Farrukh started in amazement. It was that of a government official of considerable rank, a man highly important, as Farrukh already

knew, in her husband's world. He was referred to simply as the Colonel. But what could the Colonel have in common with a ne'er-do-well like Abbas, the little weaving girl's father?

"Truly?" asked Farrukh in amazement. "But surely you did not see right. A great man like that would have no business with Osra's father."

"They were drawn back into the shadows, but I am certain," Mahmud protested. "When I served my army term, I saw him often. I would know him anywhere. And the old man, he comes to the gate often to get Osra's wages from the master weaver. I know him, too."

It was in Farrukh's mind to mention this incident to her husband. But she was still a good deal in awe of Mustapha Khan, and besides, she could not feel quite sure how he might take a confidence of this kind. More than once he had reproved her for what he called listening to servants' gossip, when she had reported some little thing that had come to her ears through Mahmud or the *kulfat*. He felt that it was below her dignity to listen to household talk.

Perhaps this new incident too would only call down a gentle rebuke for mixing in affairs with which she had no concern. So she decided to say nothing about it, though she pondered the matter in her own mind. But later on, when Mahmud's words came back to her with startling significance, she was to regret her prudence.

The beginning of *Chihel-i-Bezurgh*, or Big Forty, the

first forty days of winter, required the immediate installation of the *kurseh*—the little wooden frame that set over a pan of hot charcoals, and an enormous cotton quilt to hold in the heat. Day after day Farrukh sat with her legs thrust under the warm frame, the quilt pulled up close around her waist. A thick woolen jacket protected her shoulders, for the room itself remained cold except for the one warm spot under the quilt.

At mealtime the bread and cheese, the rice, and the stew were set on top of the *kurseh*. With cozy toes and shivering shoulders, Farrukh and Mustapha ate their food and engaged in lazy conversation.

“In the office of the law,” the young legal aide informed his wife, “we are very foreign. We have abandoned the *kurseh* and have a little iron stove instead. We feed it sticks of wood and it warms the whole room.”

“And does it warm the garden too?” Farrukh wondered.

“Oh, no, simple child! We must close the doors and windows when we make a fire. Otherwise, it eats too much fuel. That reminds me of a matter that occurred this morning.

“I was busy preparing a report on the trial of two merchants who had been caught buying foreign drafts above the legal rate. In fact, only the National Bank has government permission to deal in foreign exchange.

“While I was writing, I realized that one of those merchants was even then talking excitedly to the judge.

The servant had left the inner door ajar when he carried in some tea shortly before. So I heard every word.

“‘You will forget the episode then,’ the merchant was saying, ‘the episode, and even my name if . . . if I can procure for you so many *tomans* by sunset?’”

“*Bah! bah!*” Mustapha chuckled as he recalled the man’s great agitation. “Every man’s teeth are blunted by acids excepting the judge’s, and they require sweets. Well, the merchant left us then and came back in three hours. But he had only half the price. He thought he could haggle with Justice! The judge drew himself up grandly as he spoke to the culprit.

“‘Place not thy kettle on my grate,’ he said, ‘for its fire is cooled.’

“So the old fellow had to pay a fat fine after all, and I received a fair share of it for my work on the case. Well, that was one fire that cooled rapidly, and it was neither foreign stove nor *kurseh*.”





VI RAMAZON

Ramazon, the Month of Fasting, was at hand. Somewhere in the distance of the Persian dusk a cannon boomed, echoed and re-echoed against the mountains that encircled the Hamadan plain, and then was silent. The moment had come when the sun was fully set.

From the great gate of Farrukh Khanoum's garden several women and little girls came into the street, their

long black *chuddurs* held close to keep passersby from seeing their faces. They were the weavers who worked in Farrukh's weaving room by the gatehouse.

Osra, the youngest weaver, was faint with hunger. She had eaten nothing since sunrise, and the day's work had been long and hard. Now she hastened to a small, open shop where a big, black cauldron stood at the edge of the street. From within the folds of her robe she drew out a bright blue bowl.

"A penny's worth of *angoush-pech*," she said, pointing to the thick, sticky confection in the cauldron and drawing the veil more closely about her face.

As she hurried homeward, she saw other people carrying their bowls of liquid candy for the evening meal. How delicious it looked! Hunger pangs assailed her and she twisted her finger in the bowl and lifted it dripping to her mouth. This, the first food she had had since sunrise, was so sweet, so tantalizing, that she thrust in her finger and scooped up a second mouthful. *Angoush-pech* is well named; it means, literally, "Twist your finger," and is a dish prepared only during the month of Ramazon.

The high mud wall on each side of the street was broken at intervals by wooden gates or doors securely barred on the inside. At one particularly small gate, Osra stopped and rapped sharply with the iron knocker.

"Who is it?" promptly called a voice behind the wall.

"It is Osra. Open!" the girl replied and waited until

the squeaky wooden bolt had been pushed back and the gate opened.

“Why, Jamshid! How did you happen to be at the gate when I knocked?” Osra asked her little brother kindly. “I am glad I didn’t have to wait long, for I am very cold.”

“I had just come in,” Jamshid explained. Then, catching sight of her blue bowl, he cried out, “Oh! I got some, too! I won a penny from Vakil playing knuckle-bones. So I bought a bowl of *angoush-pech*. This is the first of Ramazon, you know, and it has been a whole year since we had any.”

Osra and Jamshid sat down on the floor, thrust their legs under the *kurseh* and pulled the quilt up to their chins. How warm it was under the *kurseh*! And how cold outside!

The mother, also sitting under the quilt, asked her children for the news of the street and factory. Osra, who had been tying knots of yarn in the solid-color background of a beautiful rug for several months, now had good news.

“Tomorrow I am to begin outlining flowers instead of doing backgrounds,” she announced happily. “My mistress, the lady Farrukh, comes in to the weaving room infrequently to supervise our work. Today she examined my work very closely. She stood beside me for a long time and watched me tie knots. Then she

questioned the master weaver and told me that I might begin the outline work tomorrow.

"Of course I shall use just black wool now instead of the lovely rose and blue and cream. But it means a promotion, and perhaps some day I shall be a master weaver. Then I'll get ten cents a day and be rich."

The mother smiled and praised her clever little daughter. Then she turned to Jamshid.

"And you? What have you been doing today? I wish we had enough money to send you to school. It is not good for you to be idle all the time."

"I played knuckle-bones with Vakil next door and won. So I bought a bowl of *angoush-pech* to break the fast. Osra bought some, too, so we shall have plenty."

Now the father and older sons came home and the whole family was soon seated under the *kurseh*—father, mother, two older sons, and the little Jamshid and Osra. On top of the *kurseh* the mother spread a large sheet of thin, brown bread which big Karim had carried home in a roll on his head. A bowl of stewed meat and vegetables, a pile of white cheese, and the two bowls of *angoush-pech* were placed on the sheet of bread, which served as both food and tablecloth. Having worked all day without food, everyone was ravenous and spoke scarcely a word as he tore off bits of bread to scoop up the hot stew, or munched the rubbery cheese.

Finally the father broke the silence.

"How is it that there are two bowls of *angoush-pech*?

Is that the way you foolishly spend the money I earn? The great risks that I take, the dangers I . . .” He caught himself sharply. Even his own family was unaware of the exact nature of his occupation.

His wife attempted to quiet his anger. “But, Abbas, Jamshid bought one bowlful with a penny he won at knuckle-bones. That is different, is it not?”

“Gambling money or my wages, it is all the same,” he bellowed. “He knows not the value of money, and never will unless he toils for it. And as for Osra, she is worse. Like water, her wages slip through her fingers. *Angoush-pech!* Did I give you permission to buy it?”

In terror, Osra fingered the large sheet of bread. “N-no, Father,” she said.

“See that you remember well, then,” Abbas growled. “And to impress it clearly on your mind, you and I will have a talk by ourselves later.”

Osra’s mother was deeply distressed. “Osra is such a good girl,” she lamented to herself. “And she has so few pleasures. Always the weaving. And now, the harsh words from her father.”

But Abbas was speaking again. “My brother, Hossein, has asked us to come to his garden tomorrow,” he was saying, “and break the fast with his family at midnight.”

His wife seized upon his words eagerly. “How fine!” she cried. “And Osra—you may wear your pink blouse and cerise jacket under your *chuddur!* And we shall all

sit up late and drink much tea. Oh, assuredly, I, too, must wear my prettiest clothes."

The thought of a special celebration to end the fasting greatly pleased the rest of the family. And as the bowls of *angoush-pech* were passed and each in turn dipped his finger into the soft candy, and the father and older sons smoked the water pipe and gossiped, Osra forgot her unfortunate purchase and her father's harshness, thinking, instead, of the pink blouse and the cerise jacket and the good time they would all have at Uncle Hossein's.

At bedtime the huge wall cushions were opened and the mattresses spread on the floor. These were arranged so that each person should lie as far as possible under the warm *kurseh*, with his head and shoulders protruding into the cold outside air. Osra and the smaller children went to sleep first of all, and although Abbas looked sharply at the girl from over the water pipe, he said nothing.

At midnight, however, when the family were awakened by their mother for the second meal which would prepare them for their fasting, Abbas made his way to the side of his daughter. The others were eating in drowsy silence, half asleep. But Abbas' eyes were sharp.

"Bestir your mind, Osra," he whispered fiercely. "Forget not a word of what I shall say. Each day in the weaving room, you are to listen. Do you hear me? You are to listen and you are to watch. And you are to



"You will watch and you will tell?"

learn when the master goes away, and where he goes. And if your mistress goes with him, you are to know that, too. And you are to tell me."

Osra's dark eyes were wide with fright and bewilderment. Why should her father wish to know of the master's coming and going? What did the mistress' journeyings have to do with him?

Abbas took fast hold of her arm and shook her. "Answer me! You will watch and you will tell?"

"Yes, Father," said Osra.

It was strange, so very strange, this that her father had asked of her. And the ominous note in his voice haunted her dreams, causing her to toss and twist under the *kurseh*. Even her excitement next day of beginning to outline the flowers on her rug was shadowed by memory of the fierceness of his eyes and the pinching of his fingers on her arm. When Farrukh came into the weaving room to examine her work and that of the other weavers, Osra's hands felt cold and clammy and she could not look up in answer to her mistress' encouragement.

"She is afraid she will not accomplish the outlining satisfactorily," thought Farrukh, noting the child's agitation and patting Osra's head encouragingly.

"Have no fear, little one," she said. "You have begun well. And if you could but have your glass of tea, you yourself would see that the flowers are growing prettily under your hands."

This was her opportunity, Osra knew, to ask her mistress about her plans and those of Mustapha Khan. But the words would not come. Nor did Farrukh again enter the weaving room before the sunset cannon boomed and the weavers left their looms and hurried home to break the fast.

"Now for the pretty clothes!" cried her mother when Osra came in.

But no answering smile brightened the child's face. "Where is Father?" she asked dully.

"Look for yourself," answered her mother.

Standing outside the door, despite her mother's urgent admonitions for haste, Osra watched for Abbas' return. And when at length she spied him, she went out slowly to meet him.

"Father," she said. "I could not ask. She was so kind. What business is it of mine and yours that I should know when they depart, when return?"

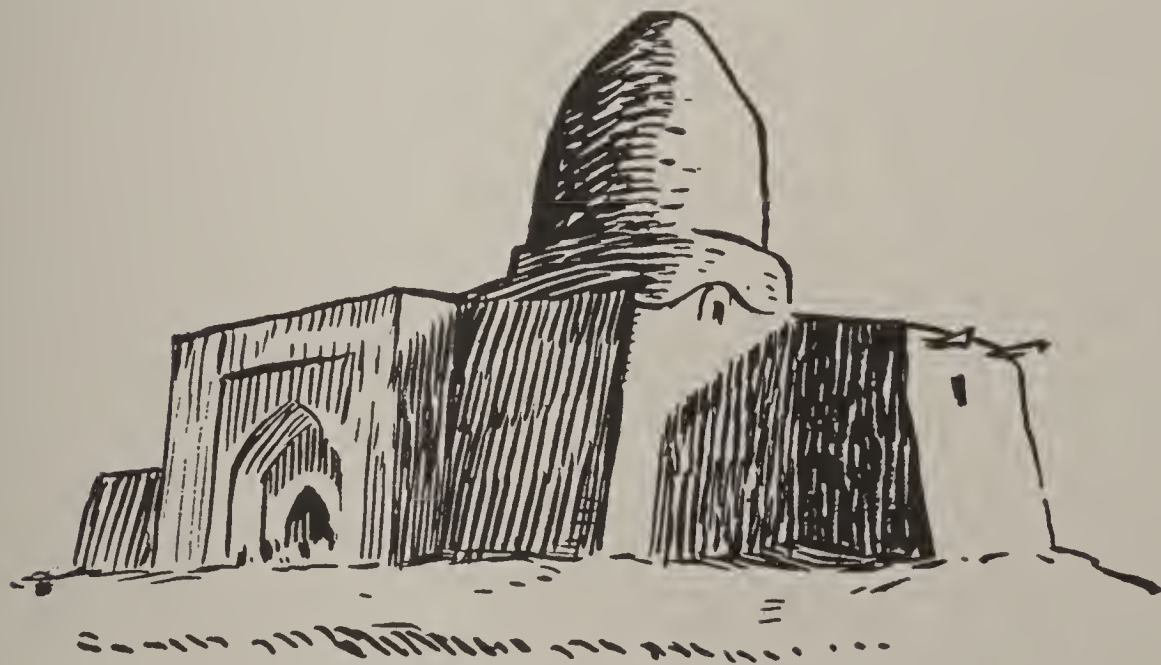
Abbas' cheeks flushed in sudden anger. "Ask! I did not tell you to ask! Had you asked, stupid, you would not again go to your weaving room. Watch, I said. And listen. And watch you will, and listen you will. But let not one word escape you, even to your mother."

As her fingers fumbled with the fastenings, Osra felt the pink blouse and the cerise jacket to be neither bright nor gay. Nor could she join in the laughter and the fun at Uncle Hossein's. Something was very wrong, and that her father meant no good to her beloved mistress,

of this Osra was very sure. In the midst of the family's gaiety, as her thoughts returned to the happy hours in the weaving room, there grew in the child's mind first a fear, then a determination. Fear, lest by her spying she should be banished forever from the weaving room and her loom.

Then—"He said I must not ask; neither shall I," she said to herself. "And if I listen but do not hear; if I look yet see nothing but the flowers in my rug—am I to blame for that?"

It was the response of a wistful child to kindness. But Farrukh never knew.





VII NO RUZ

A steady stream of visitors had been entering the governor's garden all day—military men, officials of the province, and well-to-do merchants of the city. Ushered into the upper room by a uniformed manservant, they presented themselves to the governor.

"May you be blessed in the New Year!" was their customary salutation. "May you be blessed in the festival of the New Year! *Aid-i No Ruz mobarak bashad!*"

It was the first day of spring, Persian *No Ruz*, and a

season of national festivity. Throughout the city, every little shop was hung with gorgeous handwoven rugs in vivid hues of rose or ruby red, blue, green, orange, and brown. Drab mud walls were brightened with patterns of flowers and birds.

Servants in their semi-annual new clothes pattered gaily over the cobblestones, balancing on their heads large trays of sweetmeats, cakes, and flower gifts. Mahmud had early hastened to Mas'udeh Khanoum with a trayful of the now rare *askari* grapes from his mistress' storeroom, where they had been carefully preserved from last autumn.

Mustapha Khan, setting out to pay his official festival call on the governor, searched for a *droshky* that would be in keeping with his own smart appearance, climbed in, and gave instructions to the driver. He noted with pleasure the details of his equipage. The driver was wearing a new hat, his whip was adorned with a single paper rose fastened to the handle, and his gray horses had their haunches and tails stained with henna. A cluster of bright blue beads twined in their manes kept off the Evil Eye.

The *droshky* rolled smoothly along the river road, narrowly missed several pedestrians who were promenading in the splendor of holiday attire, crossed an ancient high-arched bridge which spanned the Hamadan river, and then rattled up a short lane to stop abruptly before an open gate. On the great pole above

the gate fluttered a flag—stripes of red, white, and green with an emblem of the Lion and Sun on the central stripe.

A uniformed servant led Mustapha Khan up the steep stone stairs and along a balcony to a door that opened on the garden. As soon as the servant had announced his presence, Mustapha Khan stepped into the room and made salutation to the governor.

“May you be blessed in the New Year!” they exclaimed simultaneously, according to the Persian tradition, which holds any hesitation discourteous. To wait for another to make first greeting would imply that one felt oneself superior and even in a person of higher rank this would be accounted as snobbishness.

The governor’s receiving room was furnished with handmade walnut Morris chairs, a dozen at least, arranged with military precision in stiff rows around the room. Some of the guests, however, sat on the floor, on the luxurious rugs, to which they were more accustomed.

Mustapha Khan drank two glasses of tea in silence. Meantime he listened to the other guests discussing the proposed plan for a central, municipal flower garden and six straight avenues through the city radiating from the flower garden.

All conceded that the project would beautify the city, but each expressed objections, secretly fearing that his own property in the bazaar would be confiscated or

his merchandise turned over to the wreckers in an unexpected night onslaught on the bazaar section.

It was not long after the last of the other guests had departed that Mustapha Khan realized the servant must have been instructed to admit no further callers. The governor looked at his young caller intently and cleared his throat.

“Your *No Ruz* gift was delivered to me this morning. I am very grateful to you. It shall be a good memory in my life. You have worked with me only a short time, Mustapha Khan, but I already see that you can become valuable to me. Therefore, it was with regret that I acceded to certain changes that have been proposed for my department.”

The young legal aide cast a startled look of apprehension at the governor. New Year's Day was the time when changes frequently occurred in government positions, as well as the customary date for signing contracts. Could it be that he was to be discharged? He mentally reviewed recent happenings, but could see no occasion for dissatisfaction with his work.

“Yes, Your Excellency,” he smiled stiffly at last.

The governor fingered his moustache thoughtfully, deliberately lengthening the suspense and increasing his listener's anxiety.

“Do you recall that the Head of the Department of Finance, acting in his capacity as tax collector, has made frequent visits to my office recently and that he has often

demanded to see the papers you have prepared for certain cases?

“Very well! He now demands that you, my young friend, be transferred to the Department of Finance to work directly with him. Because of his large property holdings and great personal influence, the Ministry at Teheran has granted his petition.”

Mustapha Khan relaxed.

“It is my misfortune, while yet it is good fortune. I am indebted to you for delivering to me the news of this promotion, Your Excellency, but I am indeed loath to sever an association which has been so pleasant.”

“So you call this both good news and bad,” the governor laughed, pleased by his young assistant’s complimentary speech. “Then how would the poet class me? ‘Keep to yourself any intelligence that may prove unpleasant, till some person else has disclosed it:—Bring, O nightingale! the glad tidings of spring, and let the owl be the harbinger of evil.’

“Nevertheless, Mustapha Khan, your place will always be green. Your new work, I daresay, will take you into the provinces at frequent intervals, and I myself may be transferred to another province at any time. But come to see me some time when you are in the city and I am still in Hamadan.”

There was much rejoicing in the little household when Mustapha came home to tell his good news. This promotion meant a great deal in his career, as Farrukh

was quick to realize. His first act was to call immediately upon the tax collector, who happened to be in Hamadan at the time; while Farrukh, as a good wife prepared to second her husband's official duties, lost no time in making a formal visit both to the governor's wife and the wife of the tax collector.

It was a new experience, a new enlarging of her social world, and she felt a little timidity as she chose the garments best fitted for this first official call. But the governor's lady was gracious to her shy young guest, remembering perhaps a time when she herself had gone through the same ordeal. When Farrukh sat down, the black silk *chuddur* falling about her shoulders, her fat, kindly hostess waddled toward her with a slender silver ewer in her hands. Farrukh cupped her fingers together, while the woman poured rosewater into her hands.

"May your hand never pain you!" she murmured softly, as she quickly patted the rosewater on the top of her head and on her cheeks.

"May your heart never pain you!" the hostess responded.

On the tray from which Farrukh was served were many delicacies. With a diminutive silver spoon she helped herself to two or three of the delicious roseberries floating in a tiny bowl of sweetened rosewater. And with housewifely zeal she made a mental note of this delectable concoction, resolving to gather some of

the red seed pods from her own rose bushes next autumn and preserve them in rosewater syrup.

That evening the young husband and wife stood together on their flat roof to watch the fireworks that were being set off from the neighboring housetops in celebration of the New Year. Farrukh told about her visit and the kindly reception she had met with. Mustapha too had much to discuss, for he was tending more and more, as Farrukh proudly realized, to the Western custom of sharing with her his thoughts and plans. She would be his helpmate, not merely his wife according to the old tradition; she too must share the responsibilities of the new position.

Around them, as the twilight slowly deepened into night, a chain of flashing lights appeared along the lower slopes of the mountains which swept in a crescent about the Hamadan plain. A cluster of brilliant splashes marked the festivities of each of the many villages in the foothills, while nearer at hand sky rockets and roman candles rose and fell in flashes of colored light.

The housetops along the Street of The Mulberry Trees were crowded with laughing groups. On a nearby roof several boys were touching off firecrackers and sky rockets. Their father placidly sat on the cylindrical stone which was used to roll the sod roof, smoking his cigarette and counting off the amber beads of his rosary. The two youngest children kept their mother in a constant panic, running to the edge of the roof as if to jump off.

"Look! look!" Farrukh cried to her husband. "That last rocket shot off in a curve and went down into someone's garden."

Scarcely had she spoken when an irate housewife appeared on a neighboring roof, her face half uncovered so she could better shout across the housetops.

"What do you young rascals mean?" she screamed. "Your fireworks broke my window and burned a hole in my rug."

The youngest lad was quick with a retort.

"'If thou art displeased with us, do not look sour, for thou art already sufficiently offensive.'"

His brother, a schoolboy with a fair knowledge of literature, continued, "'An assemblage is formed of roses and tulips, and thou art stuck up amidst them like a withered stalk.'"

But their glee was short-lived. The father, roughly shaking them into silence, apologized to the aggrieved neighbor for his sons' impudence and damage to her property, and then commanded the boys to empty their pockets of coins to pay for the broken window pane.

"But, Father," they cried in dismay, "these pennies are to buy powder balls. How can we celebrate *No Ruz* without a few powder balls to throw on the cobblestones and startle everyone by their explosion?"

"No!" their father remained adamant. "You were rude to the woman. That is why you must use your own money. Remember this always: A peasant can

be as polite as a prince. You are neither peasant nor prince, but it behooves you to learn this lesson of politeness."

"He speaks truly," Mustapha Khan murmured to his wife. "If you expect to get on in the world, you must put honey on your tongue."

For ten days *No Ruz* leavened society with its bright colors and gaiety. For ten days women called upon each other, drinking tea and eating hard sweet cakes, and men sat in open gardens of the public tea house, smoking the sociable water pipe and "eating the air."

On the last day of the festival, women carried to the river their jugs on which blades of wheat were growing thickly, and threw them into the turbulent current. Thus they symbolically discarded all the griefs and ills which had accumulated during the past months, and were ready to start the new year with fresh water jugs and fresh hope and vitality.





VIII WISHES

Sunlight sifted through the slender green leaves of the almond trees, making a pattern of light and shadow. Bareheaded, her hands clasped idly on her lap, Farrukh sat gazing round her on this enclosed garden that she loved, and her thoughts went back to the familiar home garden in Tuhistan, to the days before her marriage and the morning when she had stood, trembling and doubtful, before the old matchmaker in her mother's house. So much had happened since then!

She could smile now, remembering that morning's trickery, though it still brought a little flush to her cheeks. Today she could read in earnest; the first drudgery of her lessons with the *mirza* was over, and he was proud of his pupil. In other ways too she was little by little learning to become the accomplished helpful wife that she longed to be. Her weaving was going well; even Mustapha's mother praised the work that her looms were turning out. Her husband's new affairs were prospering; life was running smoothly.

And she herself, she knew, had developed in many ways from the timid country girl who had come to this house as a bride those many months ago. She was learning a new social ease and confidence, and formal calls no longer terrified her. The ladies of rank with whom she was brought in contact were kindly women, well disposed towards her, and she felt able now to hold her own in their company as befitted the young wife of a rising government official. Yes, the New Year had begun well and was full of hopeful promise.

What else could a girl desire, married to a rich *khan*—a man of wealth, family and position—who was good to her and gave her servants and fine clothes! One thing and one only; with that her happiness would be full. In recent weeks a vague uneasiness had begun to crowd itself to the fore and overshadow the bright joyousness of her life. Seven months had passed since her wedding day, and as yet she had no intimations of motherhood.

Not that she was eager to assume the restrictions and burdens of motherhood—she was only seventeen and still child enough to find much simple pleasure in social affairs, in new clothes, and shopping trips to the bazaar—but she feared her husband's disfavor if she could not give him sons. Suppose two years passed and she bore him no children! What then? He would have just cause to divorce her, or he might even bring another wife into the home. And how could she bear to share her home with another woman?

She recalled an incident which had occurred one day when she had gone to the foreign dispensary to be vaccinated. She was waiting her turn when a man and two women came into the doctor's garden. At sight of the man she had quickly covered her face, but not before she had noticed that one of the women was holding a blood-stained cloth to her mouth. The second woman kept her face covered and walked behind the man. Before this urgent need, the doctor let other patients wait while he attended to the injury.

"They are my wives and they were fighting," the man explained. "This one," pointing to the veiled figure, "is a little tiger. She bit the lip off. I hope you can sew it on again. I dislike an ugly woman."

"The husband of an ugly woman should be blind," Farrukh had unconsciously recalled the common saying. And she had listened in distress to the woman's shrieks of pain as stitch after stitch was taken in the tender flesh.

Then she heard the man say roughly, "Now, you little vixen! Take off your bracelets and earrings and pay for this." As she began now to think of the unpleasant possibility of having another woman in her home, she said to herself fiercely:

"But I would do the same, indeed! I would bite off her lip, and both ears, too."

Although Mustapha Khan had given her the little white donkey to ride whenever she chose, she had been loath to set out on the long journey over the mountain to consult with her mother in Tuhistan, about her problem. Mas'udeh Khanoum, though she thought she had been kind to her son's wife, was nevertheless too critical in her attitude to invite confidence. Nothing remained but to listen to the *kulfat*, and the *kulfat's* tales were all of miracles and magic. Magic, the *kulfat* said, would bring her heart's desire.

Well, if prayers and longing failed, might not magic work? Would not her mother tell her to use that very means? For all her modern ambitions, in some ways Farrukh was still at heart a simple Persian girl, brought up in the tradition and superstitions of her people. And she, as well as the *kulfat*, knew the particular magic which was now needed.

At the intersection of three winding streets near the heart of the city there was an irregular common, a barren triangle partly appropriated for burial space by the poorest beggars and partly used for display space by a

baker who hung his long, brown sheets of bread on the wall outside his shop. Schoolboys on their homeward way often loitered in the broad area for a game of knuckle-bones.

Like a sleepy sentinel among the gravestones and gamblers stood the Wishing Fountain, a dreary little structure of mud brick adorned with arabesque tiles which in many places had fallen out and left disfiguring blotches of gray. Innumerable padlocks, rags, and string fretted the delicate iron grillwork of the window arches. Like a garland adorning the brow of a faded beauty grew straggling daisies along the rim of the hard-rolled sod roof.

Long ago some grateful soul had built this protection over a precious water supply and someone else had imagined that this particular water had exhibited miraculous powers. And so it had come about that men believed they could drink of this water and make their wishes come true.

As Farrukh sat mournfully in the garden, seriously considering for herself the advisability of a visit to the Wishing Fountain, the *kulfat* passed by, on her way to the public bath. Quickly the sharp eyes of the old servant read trouble in the mind of her adored young mistress, and she hesitated before her. For thoroughly as she enjoyed her hours in the steam room, gossiping with the other women, gladly would she forego that pleasure to lighten the burden of sadness for her beloved one.

But no, her mistress wished to be alone, for now she was saying, "Why do you not have your hair henna-ed today? And your fingernails and toenails? When we go with the master to Tuhistan next week, you will wish to look beautiful for your family."

The *kulfat* bowed, adjusting her veil and taking tighter hold on the bundle of clean clothes tied up in a cotton square. It should be as the young mistress wished. If she would be alone for the three hours that a good henna treatment demanded, alone she should be.

With impatience, Farrukh watched the *kulfat* depart. For her mind was now definitely made up. She would go to the Wishing Fountain, and if possible to the Stone Lion which was reputed to have in rare degree the magic power of which she was in such special need just now.

As soon as it was safe to do so, therefore, Farrukh slipped from the garden and hastened down the street. In one hand she held a bowl of sheep fat; in the other, a padlock. Her heavy black veil hid her face and concealed the objects in her hands. And no one noticed her as she sped along.

Now she had reached the common and was picking her way past the stony graves. Quickening her steps, she hastened toward the fountain, gazing curiously as she circled it. The side nearest the street wall was open. She went in. One stone in the floor had been removed and was lying at the side. A faint light flickered from a narrow ledge where a burning cotton wick floated in

a saucer of castor oil. Farrukh saw its reflection dancing in the water. Then she stooped over the opening, dipped the gourd into the cool flowing water, and drank. On the ledge beside the lamp she laid a coin. The shopkeeper nearby collected the money and purchased castor oil for the little shrine lamp.

Having drunk of the fountain, Farrukh spread open her tiny padlock, made her wish, and locked it into the fountain grillwork. Other wishes were tied on with string or rags, but hers was more firmly secured. As she turned away, she spoke to herself half aloud and wholly exultant.

“On the Wishing Fountain my wish shall stay until I bear a man-child.”

Turning from the Wishing Fountain, Farrukh hesitated. Ought she to go to the Stone Lion, after all? She had brought the bowl of sheep fat especially to propitiate him and win his favor. But the Stone Lion was outside the city. It was unheard-of for a woman of her station to venture there alone. Well Farrukh knew that she risked her husband's anger if he ever came to know of such a visit.

And yet, and yet? Here she was, safely away from home and with the *kulfat* disposed of for hours. Such a chance might never come again. It would be easy to slip out to the Stone Lion and back, with no one the wiser. And had not the old servant assured her she would find in the ancient statue a magic far more power-

ful than that of the Wishing Fountain? The thought drew her like a magnet. Surely it was right for her to risk anything, at all, in such a cause!

For a bare moment longer, Farrukh stood motionless. Then, drawing her veil still closer about her, she set out, her heart beating fast. As swiftly as she could she toiled over the rough cobblestones until she reached the edge of the city. There she took the sandy road which traversed the plain in a southeasterly direction. No need to ask her way; the *kulfat* had described it to her time and again. There was only the one road to take, and before Farrukh had followed it very far she saw the Stone Lion before her—one of a pair which legend said had guarded the entrance to the palace of Darius.

The centuries had left their mark on old *Sang-i-Sheer*, the Stone Lion, and his nose rubbed one of the many sandstone rocks which abound on the Hamadan plain. Weathering had effaced some of the sculptured lines of his rocky bulk, and formed shallow pockets in his head and shoulders. But he was still a giant, this eleven feet of solid stone, still the king of beasts.

A handful of pebbles lay heaped on his head, votive offering of some other wishful woman. On the ground at frequent intervals were piles of small stones, heaped up by fearful wayfarers in anticipation of a chance meeting with the Devil. Throughout the length and breadth of the land were these haphazard stone piles wherever there was danger of meeting him—on the outskirts of



The centuries had left their mark on old Sangi-i-Sheer

a village, along a mountain pass, or in some deep ravine.

Were Farrukh to be suddenly surprised by the appearance of that Evil Spirit as she stood there surveying the ancient sculpture, she had but to reach down and gather up a handful of stones and fling them at the *jinn*, who would straightway flee from sight. And then, in gratitude for her deliverance, she would rebuild the heap for the next wayfarer.

The sheep fat in the little green bowl had melted in the afternoon heat. Farrukh dipped her fingers into the grease, lifted them dripping to the lion's head, and rubbed his face and shoulders with the unsavory ointment. Each stroke of her fingers rubbed her wish more deeply into his weatherbeaten features.

"Oh, that I might have a man-child! That I might bring my husband joy with many children!"

She stooped to pick up stones to place a heap on the head of the lion in celebration of her wish.

"*Insh'allah!* If God wills, there will be a child now. The Wishing Fountain and the Stone Lion can not both fail."

Looking up from her ceremonial task, she was startled to see a girl standing nearby. She had heard no sound, either of carriage wheels or donkey or footsteps on the stony soil. Then she noticed that the girl's feet were bare, broad and brown and dusty, and that her veil was coarse and faded and torn.

"And do you too desire children?" Farrukh asked.

"No! no!" the other replied bitterly. "I have come to seek a husband."

"But how can that be? Is it not arranged for you by your family?"

"My family cannot arrange it. There is no dowry and my face is very plain. I have waited a long time."

"And what do you propose to do now?"

"Do you not know? It is a custom among the Hamadanis. I shall sit on the Stone Lion, all day, perhaps many days, and by that token it is made known that I desire to marry. I am bound to accept the first man who asks me, even if he desires only a temporary wife."

The girl winced as Farrukh shuddered and involuntarily drew back.

"It is hard, yes," she continued. "But how much harder is it to see my father and mother grow old and to know that after they are gone I shall have no home unless I marry, or beg in the streets and live in the city house."

She clambered awkwardly, reluctantly, onto the Stone Lion to wait. Farrukh picked up her green bowl, drew the veil across her face, mumbled a faint "May God protect you!" and turned into the sandy road which led back to the city.

Where the road sweeps around the southern end of the Musallah hill, there stands a rude little tower which looks as if it might have been built to defend this entrance to the city, so squat and thickset is it and so com-

manding in its location. That it is only a brick kiln is a pity, for it has all the marks of a medieval watchtower.

The Musallah itself is a long oval hill which dominates the Hamadan plain, a perfectly planned acropolis, and was even so used by Astyages the Mede, who built on it the royal treasury surrounded by seven walls of seven colors; and still later by Cyrus the Great and Alexander the Great.

The brick kiln excited Farrukh's curiosity and she walked past it slowly. Since her coming to Hamadan, she had never once been outside the city, never even to a spot from which she could see the outlines of the ancient acropolis. So now that her path ran along the base of the stronghold, her feet unconsciously strayed from the sweeping curve of the road in an impulse to explore the ruins that straggled across its rocky slopes. The half distinguishable outlines of what once must have been a watchtower occupied the southern end.

So, happy in the completion of her mission, Farrukh climbed the slope with eager steps, pausing now and then to admire a wild tulip or crocus and even stopping long enough to dig out a tiny purple hyacinth plant with a bit of broken pottery which lay on the ground. On the hilltop she climbed to the highest point of the pile of ruins and overlooked the plain.

The city was one waving mass of dusty green, for every garden, however small, had its tall, slim poplar trees planted beside the narrow irrigation streams.

Four great pointed domes rose above the monotonously flat housetops. The beautiful glazed tile dome and slender minarets of the Friday Mosque stood out boldly against the western sky. In the bazaar section rose another dome with its twin towers. Farrukh had often noticed it in the bazaar, for its dome was patterned in intricate lines of blue and yellow and black. The other smaller domes without minarets marked the location of two famous tombs: the one, of Esther and Mordecai, which the *kulfat* had visited during the Jewish feast of Purim, and the other, of Avicenna—Ibn Sina, A. D. 100—the great Persian physician.

Farrukh raised her eyes to the skyline. Across the plain to the east lay the village of Shevarin, its brief road lined with mulberry trees for some distance out of Hamadan. Two long, low ridges of red marked the barren hills where picnickers often picked up fossils—ferns pressed into the rock, and shell formations—evidence of an ancient, vanished lake. She remembered this as she looked toward The Crest of The Cock and wished that some time Mustapha Khan would take her to these hills that she might search for some of the curious stones.

The crescent sweep of mountains reached its greatest height in the south, where the majestic *Yakh Chal* lifted its ever-snowy summit fourteen thousand feet into the turquoise heavens.

“On the other side of *Yakh Chal* lies Tuhistan,” Far-

rukhs was thinking, "and soon I shall be going back. I shall see my mother, and father, and all my brothers.

"And there is Elvend, the most beautiful mountain of all. The snow on the slopes makes the Praying Woman look as if she were wearing a white *chuddur*."

Having completed the circle of horizon, she climbed down from the ruins and picked her way over the rocky surface to the remains of a double wall which enclosed a vast area on the top of the hill.

"A palace must have been built here," she mused, "a palace or a fort. It must have been very important to require double walls."

Seeing a wide break in the wall, out of curiosity she climbed through. But she had no more than cast a glance into the enclosure when she was startled to see a group of men squatting on the ground in a far corner with books and papers on their knees. At the same instant they saw the veiled figure. In a flash they picked up stones and began to throw them at her.

"Go away! Go away! Child of a burnt father, get out of here!" they shouted at her and the stones struck her body with stinging force.

Farrukhs turned and fled, but not before she had recognized, or at least thought she recognized, one of the angry faces turned toward her. It was that of Abbas, the father of her little weaver.

Terror lent speed to her feet. As she ran, she stumbled and fell over rocks, bruising her hands on the sharp

stones and tearing her veil; then she scrambled to her feet and ran on again.

"*Khuda bikunad!* God grant that I may get safely out of here!" she prayed in terror. She, a decent woman, had been stoned and called a vile name! She might even have been caught and held prisoner by those men. Oh, why had she ever left the highway? A respectable woman, especially one of high family, did not wander about the hillsides unattended. Of what could she have been thinking to forget herself so far!

It seemed hours before she was again in the familiar Street of The Mulberry Trees, entering her own garden, hearing the stout door close solidly behind her, the heavy wooden bolt creak complainingly into place. Her garden, and she had come back safely! Farrukh sighed in infinite relief.

Her relief would have been shattered had she known that even then a thickset, heavily bearded man was standing across the street, nodding his head slowly, almost imperceptibly, as if he had just recalled something important.

But Farrukh did not know. Inside the house, she was soon busily removing all traces of her hasty flight, changing her torn clothing, smoothing her hair, and puzzling over that strange gathering upon which she had stumbled. Had Abbas recognized her? Oh, surely not, for he would never have dared attack her if he had known who she was.

But what were he and the others doing? How was it that this strange, even sinister man—as she now felt him to be—seemed to cross her path so mysteriously? That morning driving in the bazaar, with the Colonel, as Mahmud had sworn? And now?

Soon another question perplexed her. Should she tell Mustapha Khan what had happened? Her instinct urged her to do so, for deep in her heart she felt that the surprised group had been up to no good and that her husband, as a member of the Government Staff, should know of the suspicious circumstance. But her fear was stronger than her instinct. If she told him of that meeting, she must tell the whole story, explain how she had happened to be wandering there alone. How angry he would be then! More than anything else, Farrukh dreaded Mustapha Khan's anger, for she loved him and wished to please him with her every action.

If only there were someone, some member of her own family here in whom she could confide, whose advice she might ask. Bitterly now she regretted the impulse that had led her out. No, she dared not tell Mustapha Khan, even though there might be something about that secret gathering that he, as Government official, ought to know.

Then, with relief, she remembered the long-planned visit to her old home the next week. To be sure! She would talk this, too, over with her mother. Why had

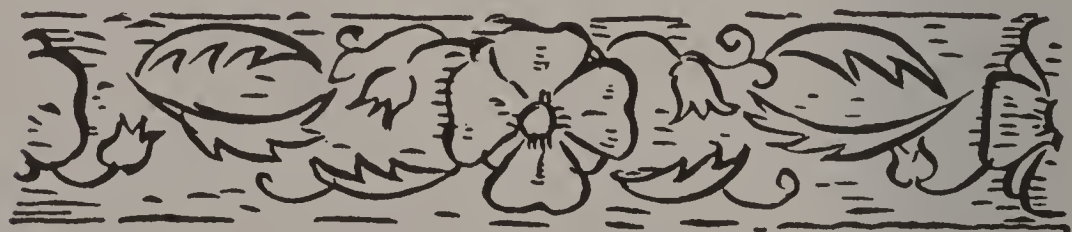
she not thought of that before? Smiling, now, she glanced at the two tall glasses of amber *sherbat* that she had poured out in readiness for her husband's return. Only an hour to sunset, and for some reason the ice carrier had not yet arrived. Everything this afternoon seemed to be going wrong!

It was at this moment that a light knock sounded on the gate. She waited impatiently, but neither the ice carrier nor her husband appeared. Instead, the gatekeeper ambled across the gravel path and stood in the doorway.

"*Khanoum*," he bowed respectfully, "an errand boy brought a message for you." He handed her a slip of paper, ingeniously folded together.

She opened it and stared at the broad, purple pen strokes. Yes, she could read it. Then she crumpled it in a shaking hand and thrust it inside her blouse.

"Silence is always golden," the note read. "A woman who does not wish to be divorced knows when to hold her tongue."





IX

THE LANDLORD'S RETURN

The day set for the journey to Tuhistan had come at last. For weeks Farrukh had been looking forward eagerly to this trip, the first visit home since her wedding day. Many times, especially of late, she had felt a little wave of homesickness sweep over her whenever she thought of home and family, and once the visit was decided upon it had seemed as though the intervening days would never pass.

Mounted on her little white donkey, riding just a few paces behind Mustapha Khan, who led the tiny cavalcade, she looked about her at the fields on either side of the road, fresh with the tender green of young wheat and the flowers, scarlet and blue and yellow, that everywhere dotted the ground with gay color. An eager happiness filled her heart. All the countryside was lovely with spring, like a giant carpet of blossom spread before the eye; indeed, the first weavers of Persian rugs might well have been inspired in their patterns by these flower-strewn fields that crowded close to the city walls.

As the string of donkeys pattered briskly forward, the little bells on their blue-beaded necklaces tinkled cheerfully on the morning air. Behind Farrukh, wrapped in her black silk veil, rode Mahmud, his white shirt tails fluttering from under his coat and his brimless black felt cap pushed back on his head. He was thoroughly enjoying the ride and kicked his heels against the animal's sides as he jogged along, from time to time bellowing a loud "*Huhhhhhhh*" of encouragement. Last of all rode the *kulfat*, beautifully henna-ed, fully as eager and excited as her young mistress, and straddled across a pair of bulging saddlebags that all but hid the patient little donkey underneath.

Alternating with the patches of young grain were other fields, where cultivated poppies were just beginning to spread their leaves of silver green. Passing one of these, Mustapha Khan turned to speak to his wife.

"These fields were all in wheat last year," he remarked. "But the price of wheat is almost nothing, and there is no profit in it now. This year a number of landlords are planting poppies for opium. Opium always brings a good price, even when the government regulates the commerce in it."

"How does the government control it?" asked Farukh.

"By requiring the growers to bring their crop to our office," her husband explained. "There it is weighed, stamped, and sealed with official paper. Then it may be sold in the bazaar. But anyone caught making even the initial transaction in unstamped opium is liable to severe punishment.

"The Government requires this recording," Mustapha Khan continued, "partly to have a check on the amount that is used at home and the amount that leaves the country. Far too many people use the drug today. Where there is no doctor for many *farsaghs* around, it is perhaps excusable that people resort to its use to still the pain and suffering of illness. *Insh'allah*, the time will come when the Government will permit only enough to be grown to take care of this demand for medicinal purposes. But how many people today have begun the practice of smoking only for the brief moment of pleasure, and now pay with minds and bodies wrecked! And still there are people who try to evade having their opium registered, and instead smuggle it

across the border and down to the gulf where private ships carry it away to foreign lands for illicit trade. Smuggled opium is sold at a higher price, you know. So some men make a business of smuggling and have an elaborate organization.

“Just the other day a man was brought before the tax collector. It was thought that he belonged to one of these opium rings. But we could not produce absolute proof. So we had to let him go.”

As he spoke there flashed into Farrukh's mind a recollection of that secret gathering she had stumbled upon in the ruins on the Musallah. Had that anything to do with opium smuggling? It was on the tip of her tongue to tell Mustapha about it and to mention again the odor of opium she always noticed upon Abbas. But to do so she would have also to confess her escapade that day, and that she dared not do. What were the words of that mysterious note: “*A woman who does not wish to be divorced . . . ?*”

Farrukh bit her lip. Better say nothing, for the present certainly. Perhaps after all it was just a foolish notion of hers, simply because he had mentioned smuggling. There might be a dozen other reasons for men to meet in secret. She would not discuss distressing thoughts on so happy an occasion as this.

Soon the checkerboard expanse of cultivated fields was left behind; they were beginning the long climb up the mountainside. The incline was steep and the path

rough. Often the donkeys had to pick their way through stony stream beds. On either side flowering plum and black cherry trees made a snowy haze as the little company passed through ravines whose abundant water supply from melting snows nourished these carefully tended orchards high above the city.

Then they came out on the open mountainside. The road wound like a dusty white ribbon round the curves of the slope. Here and there the barrenness of the stony brown soil was relieved by patches of low-spreading camel thorn, a maze of pink bloom. Though the land might be a dusty brown desert most of the year, for a few weeks in the spring it was one vast fairy garden in which hill and plain were abloom with wild tulips and hyacinths, crocus, daisies and poppies, with the delicate pink of camel thorn and the vivid blue of the chicory.

Around the bend appeared the ice carrier's donkey, staggering under a load of ice. At sight of the other donkeys, it spread open its jaws in a mighty shrieking bray. The salute was answered in kind. With difficulty the ice carrier got his animal past the others without upsetting his ice.

"God give you strength!" Mahmud called out jovially. At home it had been his job to open the gate and hold the donkey quiet each day when the man brought ice. Now he hugely enjoyed riding along leisurely like a gentleman, while the ice carrier struggled with his obstinate beast.

Far up the mountain in a sunless ravine the ice fields spread for a great distance. Flowers and shrubs there were none. The air was cold and rarified. Each rider dismounted and walked along cautiously beside his donkey, man and beast alike breathing with effort in the high altitude. A long and painful journey it was, but once they had gotten over the pass and started the descent on the southern side they found the air balmier, even though patches of snow still remained in the shadow of the great boulders.

Now the valley opened before them, and at each familiar landmark Farrukh's happiness grew. A patch of darker green, the famous walnut trees, marked the spot where the village of Tuhistan clung to the steep slope and sprawled into the ravine. The journey was almost over.

Now at last they could see the dome of the little village mosque rising above the flat, well-remembered housetops. The panorama was the most beautiful sight in the world to the old *kulfat*, who kicked her donkey vigorously and shouted out with glad excitement.

"*Alhamdulallah!* Praise the Lord! We have arrived. Speed up, there, beast!" It was with difficulty that she kept due place at the end of the procession.

On the edge of the village, more pretentious than its neighbors, lay the garden of Abdullah, Farrukh's father, the village headman. Since his house was headquarters for the landlord or any other passing guests, he received



Now the valley opened before them.

from Mustapha Khan a small annual cash gift for furnishing a guest room and consequently kept his house and garden in much better repair than most of the others.

Before the great gate Mahmud slid off his donkey and gave the iron knocker a resounding thump.

"Who is it?" called a voice within.

"Open! It is the master, Mustapha Khan," Mahmud announced grandly. A vast commotion arose inside, a babble of voices and the patter of feet running in many directions. The wooden bolt rattled as it was pushed back and the door swung open on creaking hinges, while the gatekeeper and his family gathered to greet the master.

"*Salaam-n-aleikum!* You come fortunately."

Mustapha Khan and Farrukh returned the salutation and then everyone was saying to them at once:

"Light to our eyes! May your arrival be good!"

The guests dismounted and were escorted to the house, Farrukh walking a few paces behind her husband.

Abdullah and the boys had already come part way down the gravel path.

"Peace be to you!" they greeted the Khan. "What is the state of your health?"

"Praise the Lord, it is good!" Mustapha Khan replied as he went inside with the men. At the upper end of the room, farthest from the door, he kneeled on the rug, crossed his feet, and sat back on his heels. The *kadkhoda*

and his sons did the same, but in a lower station of the room.

Tea was brought in by a manservant and conversation ceased while everyone drank the two ceremonial glasses, noisily sucking the strong beverage through lumps of sugar held between their teeth.

Then the eldest son left the room for a moment and returned with a tall water pipe which was ornamented with fishes and roses and had a long, flexible tube attachment instead of the customary short, stiff pipe. This he placed on the floor before Mustapha Khan, gravely setting it down with both hands.

"You are taking great trouble. May your hand never pain you!" the guest replied, and noticing the young man particularly, he continued:

"What has become of the beauty of thy countenance, that a beard has sprung up round the orb of the moon?"

"I know not what has befallen my face," the youth answered, "unless it has put on black to mourn its departed charms."

Everyone laughed heartily, for Rahmon took great pride in the faint, black fuzz that was beginning to cloud his cheeks. Rahmon, however, cared not at all for their laughter. He liked Mustapha Khan and knew, as did no one else in the room, that the guest was but quoting one of the poets. In fact, he liked Mustapha Khan more than ever for thus giving him an occasion to show his own learning by completing the quotation.

Seeing that the guest was now made comfortable, the sons politely took their leave and left their father and his master to discuss conditions in the village.

How was the winter wheat? How many fields were planted in barley this year? The little bridge outside the village must be repaired. How many villagers owed labor which could be applied on the project?

The *kadkhoda*, in turn, had his questions to ask the master. The man who operated the flour mill by the brook wanted his privilege tax of twenty dollars reduced to fifteen. Wheat had fallen so far in price that he could not collect enough in fees from his customers to make a profit at the business.

"In fact," Abdullah concluded, "he wants to work the mill on shares."

"I will turn it over in my mind," the landlord considered. "Tomorrow, perhaps, I will talk with him."

Manifestations of suppressed excitement in the adjoining room could now no longer be ignored. The patter of slippered feet, the muted staccato of excited voices, and the welcome aroma of hot food gave Mustapha Khan his cue. It was therefore in the exercise of his right as landlord of the village and chief guest in the house that he politely said to his host,

"Let the meal be served."

Instantly the door burst open and a procession of servants entered, bearing trays of savory food. For this

important occasion, the gatekeeper and several of his older sons had been drafted into house service.

Rajab, the head of the staff, spread a fair white cloth on the rug directly in front of the guest. Then from each of the other servants he took the trays and bowls and marched up and down the dinner cloth in his stocking feet arranging the meal.

A steaming mound of fluffy white rice on a big brass tray he set at the upper end. Surrounding it he placed bowls of chicken and apricot stew with bits of shredded almond; *osh*, a delicacy concocted of sour milk gravy with diced green vegetables; and *mast*, or clabber; a bowl of tender, stewed camel thistle stalks, not unlike asparagus, on which the nettles had not yet developed; long sheets of coarse, brown bread neatly folded in a stack; young onions and radishes.

When all was arranged to his satisfaction, Rajab signaled the servants to depart and cast a last glance of inventory on the array before he took up his post near the door.

"*Bismillah, Rahmon, Rahim!* In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate!" Abdullah repeated reverently, and the meal began.

Meanwhile, Farrukh had gone to her mother's apartment at the far end of the house.

"Your place is green," Saltanet welcomed her daughter fondly.

With what joy did these two behold each other, they

who had never been separated a day until the daughter's marriage! With what delight did they confide to each other the happenings of the seven long months, secrets and news and gossip. Farrukh described her new home and related how Mustapha Khan had discovered her deception.

"But I have learned from the mirza. And not only can I now read and write, my mother. I have my own weaving room in the garden, with six weavers busily at work. When next I come, I shall bring with me a rug of my own designing."

Saltanet listened in amazement. "You are the most fortunate girl in the world," she declared. "See to it that you always please your husband."

Farrukh caught her breath. *See to it that you always please your husband.* Yet she, who was so happy and so blessed in the head of her home, had done what would displease him! And she could not discuss her perplexity even with her own mother; she must deprive herself of the comfort of Saltanet's advice. *A woman who does not wish to be divorced knows when to hold her tongue.*

Saltanet, sensing her daughter's distress, leaned affectionately toward her. "What is it that troubles you, my daughter? Why do you eat sorrow?" she asked softly.

Farrukh looked sadly down at her clasped hands. What should she reply? Ah, she had it. "Yes, my

mother. Will there be no son to gladden our hearts?"

In silence, then, Saltanet listened to the fear that had been growing in her daughter's mind, lest no children come to brighten the new home. And wisely she nodded her head when she heard of the expedition to the Wishing Fountain—the part of her adventure which Farrukh felt safe in relating.

"*Jinn* or no *jinn* in that Fountain," her mother commented, when Farrukh had finished her story, "what you should do now is go on a pilgrimage. Go to Qom or Ardabil. If the Khan cannot take time to go so far, then go to some little shrine near Hamadan and pray for your desire. Do you remember old Mariam, who had twenty-two children? She thought she would never bear a child. But after she had gone on a pilgrimage, she was blessed with many children."

They were interrupted by the *kulfat* slumping the saddlebags down on the brick verandah.

"Be careful, Shokat, or you will break something in those bags," Farrukh called out to her. The maid was already out of hearing, but soon returned bearing a tray with the women's dinner. Their meal consisted of whatever had been left by the men. After the arduous ride over the mountain and the long wait after her arrival, Farrukh ate ravenously of the food, though it was already half cold.

After the meal, Saltanet watched eagerly while Farrukh unpacked the saddlebags, for a returned traveler

always brings presents to relatives and friends. For her mother there was a new water jug and a little hand-woven square of creamy cloth decorated with a hand-blocked design of palm leaves; for her father, a turquoise collar button; and for each of her brothers, a pocket knife made in Zenjan. The old *kulfat* at home was made happy with a pink comb, and the gatekeeper's children shrieked with delight when they tasted their grape molasses taffy.

"How long will Mustapha Khan stay with us?" Saltanet asked when, at length, all the presents had been distributed.

"Not more than three days. He must hurry back, for the Head of the Department of Finance wants to take him to a special court session in the province."

Three days! How short they were for a girl to drink tea with all her friends and tell them of life in the city, of the vast bazaars and high society! How full they were for a homesick *kulfat*, who now found herself an envied figure among the ignorant villagers as they listened to her embroider tales of the great city! And how fraught for the young Khan with events which were to disrupt the smooth routine and calm security of his life.



X

BURIED TREASURE

It was on the second day of their stay in Tuhistan that the incident occurred which was to have such a far-reaching effect upon Mustapha Khan's career. Upon Abdullah's request the young landlord had gone with him to inspect a certain underground watercourse which long ago had fallen into disuse through lack of repair. The men went down a narrow flight of steps fashioned of rocks rudely fitted together, and found themselves in

a stone-lined channel, which for centuries had carried the melting snows to the orchards and wheat fields down the mountainside. Whenever a channel became choked with dirt or fallen stones, Abdullah assigned the villagers to a number of days' labor in repairing them. The present inspection trip was to determine the extent of repairs needed and the probable cost so that the landlord and his *kadkhoda* could make proper provision when other repairs were made in the autumn.

Several stones had fallen from a place on the side wall of the channel. Mustapha Khan inspected the spot closely and poked his fingers around adjoining stones to determine how solidly they remained in place. As he thrust his hand back into the opening, his fingers touched something smooth of irregular shape. He tried to extricate it, but the hard-packed soil which had lain on it for many years held it fast.

The young man scraped away the soil to see just what the object was and beheld a rounded surface of creamy gray glaze with greenish blue leaves and flowers intertwined in an intricate pattern. A vase! But how did it come to be there?

Abdullah opened his knife and broke away the hard soil bit by bit. Then he carefully lifted out the vase and gave it to Mustapha Khan. The extraordinary weight of it surprised them.

"*Ajab!*" he exclaimed. "It must be full of lead bullets, it is so heavy! What can be in it?" Mustapha Khan

was increasingly surprised to discover that the top was sealed with wax. Faint impressions of a lettered seal were still visible. Abdullah moistened his handkerchief and cleaned the dirt off the wax surface. Then Mustapha Khan studied it intently.

"Part of it is not clear," he said at last, "but I can make out the date 1258. See? Here and here and here!" He pointed eagerly to the faint tracings. "That must have been about sixty years ago. Then there is a name, but I can make out only part of it . . . SUR KH . . . It was a square seal. You can see where the corners pressed into the wax.

"Here! Give me the knife. Let us see what is inside." In several places he tried to insert the blade around the top of the vase, but the wax was old and seemed almost to have turned to stone.

Mustapha Khan snapped the knife shut.

"There!" he said, returning it to Abdullah. "I am very grateful to you, but it wouldn't work. I'll have to try some other method. It is a virtuous little urn, is it not?" And he chuckled at the thought.

"Virtuous?" Abdullah was plainly puzzled.

"Why, surely you recall the proverb: 'A wise man is like a vase in a druggist's shop, silent, but full of virtues.' This vase is decidedly tight-lipped: I cannot even pry it open. And it is so heavy it must be full—of virtues, let us say!"

“Well said, Mustapha Khan! But how do you propose to discover its virtues?”

Mustapha Khan smiled and led the way up the stone stairs. A little later he and Abdullah were bending anxiously over a basin of hot water, in which he held the mouth of the vase. The samovar stood on the floor beside them and Abdullah occasionally drew more hot water from the little spout.

“Praise the Lord! It is softening!” the young man cried excitedly. At the same moment he noticed that the dirt had entirely dissolved and now left the wax surface clean and clear. What had seemed illegible before, now was plainly discernible.

“*Mansur Khan, 1258,*” it read.

“Why, that was my grandfather!” Mustapha Khan cried in amazement. “And I have the very seal that made this impression. I think I must have been his favorite, for he used to talk to me by the hour. He it was who instilled in my heart a love for poetry through the many verses he used to recite to me. When he died, they gave me his seal. I was just a lad, but I prized it, and it has always been a good memory in my life. See!”

He drew a small leather pouch from his pocket and among the coins and trinkets that rolled on the floor was a small square seal of lapis. He compared the letters on the wax with those cut intaglio in the blue stone. They were identical.

To their amazement, when the wax seal was finally lifted off, a stream of golden coins fell out upon the floor, one yellow coin rolling unnoticed straight into the corner by the door. The two eagerly examined the treasure.

"Gold dollars from the reign of Fath Ali Shah in 1210!" Abdullah whispered in awe. "He must have hidden them in this manner during one of the terrifying Lur raids. Men's property was not safe in those days."

"Or, perhaps, he was hiding his tangible wealth from the king," Mustapha Khan mused. "You know how it was in those days. If the king paid a visit to a rich subject, he expected a large present; and if it was not immediately forthcoming, he often seized certain valuables outright and then grandly thanked the subject for the forced gift.

"Not only his wealth but his life might be in danger. 'To sport an opinion contrary to the judgment of the king were to wash our hands in our own blood. Were he verily to say this day is night, it would behoove us to reply: Lo! there are the moon and the seven stars!'"

"But that was long ago," Abdullah protested, "and now you have a treasure here! Those antique coins will fetch more than their face value."

"You mean they *would* fetch more," the Khan corrected him. "Don't you know that our Shah says everything below the surface of the soil belongs to the government? That is the reason they watch so closely

the excavations that are being made by the foreign archeologists."

With shaking fingers they counted nineteen golden coins, which, because of their antiquity, might be worth a large sum, and restored them to the vase. Then, hearing footsteps, the Khan hurriedly thrust the treasure behind a wall cushion and lazily reclined against it.

"Abdullah," he was saying as the servant entered, "return to the *qan'at* and see if I dropped my knife on the stones. Look carefully, especially where the stones are loose."

Abdullah bowed to his master and left the room.

The servant, Rajab, hesitated in the doorway, his eyes cast furtively on the floor.

"Master, I was told to bring the water pipe in half an hour," he explained, as he set it on the floor before the landlord.

"It is well," the master replied, as he took up the pipe tube and leaned back comfortably against the nineteen golden coins. "You may take away the samovar."

The servant picked up the steaming copper vessel and carried it from the room, returning a moment later for the water bowl. It was then that a rather curious thing happened. Instead of going straight out again, the man hesitated by the doorway an instant, stooped over and made an elaborate gesture as of smoothing out a corner of the fringed rug that lay there, his back turned to-

wards his master. Then he straightened himself again and departed, bowl in hand.

When Abdullah at last returned Mustapha Khan turned to him eagerly.

“What did you find? Anything else?”

“No, nothing else,” the latter replied disappointedly. “Only a few old silver coins like those we turn up many a time in our plowing. One thin coin of Iskandar Rumi, Alexander the Great, such as he used to pay his soldiers; and two Sassanian coins of the ruling prince in a very tall headdress. That was all.”

“Keep them,” the landlord told him. Such coins, though two thousand years old, were so common in Hamadan as to be almost worthless, for they were so small and thin as to contain only a negligible quantity of silver.

As for the gold coins, Mustapha Khan decided for the time being to keep his own counsel. Abdullah could be trusted to say nothing about them. For, although it was true that all buried treasure belonged by law to the government, this applied to treasure discovered by accident, as had sometimes occurred in plowing or in digging the foundations of a house. Such coins might have lain in the ground for centuries and it would be impossible to establish their original ownership.

Here, it seemed to Mustapha Khan, the case was entirely different. The money had been buried by his grandfather, sealed with his own seal, and hidden on

his own land which had descended from father to son through generations. His own wide knowledge of the law, therefore, assured him that what he had discovered was definitely family property and the government could have no first claim upon it.

Nevertheless, it might be necessary to declare it, purely as a formality, but this he would do at his own convenience and in the manner he judged best. He might be mistaken, of course, but in any case it was a point that would bear considering. In the meantime he decided to keep the coins safely hidden, so as to avoid all possible gossip, until he had leisure to approach the question of his claim with the proper authorities.

With this intent he wrapped the coins in a cloth and stowed them away in the bottom of his saddlebag without so much as a word even to his wife.

“For if I warn her,” he thought, “she will be sure to mention something about it to her mother, and then gossip will be started.”

Little he knew how dear that decision was to cost him.

A motley throng gathered in Abdullah’s garden the following day. The landlord was holding court and every villager who had a grievance came to lay it before him. Abdullah, who was headman of the village, also had his story to tell of villagers who had been unruly, who had made trouble with their neighbors, or failed to perform their share of the common tasks.

Mustapha Khan heard each man’s complaint or plea

and tried to mete out fair treatment to all. The peasant who had failed to do his share of mending the roadway was sentenced to give extra time in cleaning the water-courses. The man who took melons the previous autumn from his neighbor's roof where they had been stored was sentenced to work three days in that neighbor's melon patch, irrigating or hoeing or doing whatever the neighbor should see fit.

"But leave the melons on the vines," the landlord warned him.

The miller who wanted to operate his mill on a different basis was heard and had his request granted. The charcoal vendor was granted repairs for his shop in the bazaar, but his rent was increased. So he went away wondering whether he had gained anything, after all.

Finally, there was a large group of peasants who had come to petition for a redistribution of the farm lands.

"Master, when will it please you to make a new allotment of the fields? It has been many years since the last division and conditions have changed for many of us." Thus spoke one of the group.

And another: "Master, I have two sons coming of age. They desire fields also, and land space in the village to build their houses. Now that Naghi has sold his oxen for donkeys and works on the caravan routes, his fields lie idle and he cares not."

"And the fields that have been made over to the priest," put in a shepherd whose face had been made



Finally, there was a large group of peasants

almost black by sun and wind, "what of them? They too lie idle. Or, if we till them, we get only a third of the crop. My boy Bahram is old enough now to tend the flocks and I could have a barley field or two."

The landlord heard their tales and listened to others who had had misfortune. All wanted a reapportionment. The hearing was not complete until the *kadkhoda* had belittled some stories and disapproved of their requests, or corroborated and recommended others. Abdullah was well liked by the villagers who felt that he represented their interests fairly, much better in fact than the scheming, smooth-tongued *kadkhoda* of the next village. And Mustapha Khan felt that the headman was loyal to him too. So he weighed carefully the requests that came up. The problem was complicated by rumors he had been hearing. For the parliament in Teheran was considering a bill which would make it possible for any villager to register a house and yard in his own name, provided he had lived in it continuously for twenty years. If this bill were passed—and it probably would be in time, for the Shah approved of it—then how long would it be until his villagers learned of it and registered their houses in their own names? On the whole, it might be best to order a new apportionment after the crops had been harvested, and keep the peasants contented.

The last villager went away, grumbling or happy according to his award, and Mustapha Khan and Abdullah

relaxed as they waited for tea. It was brought by Rajab, the same servant who had acted so strangely in removing the samovar the day before when Mustapha had discovered the vase.

Noiselessly he entered in stocking feet, set down the samovar, and brought in a tray with tiny glasses and a bowl of lump sugar and two tall glasses of quince *sherbat* in which chipped ice tinkled and gleamed.

"A present from my brother," Rajab explained as he noticed their surprised glances. "He carries ice to the Hamadanis and once in a great while he comes on over the mountain. It is a long journey that he makes every day; so he stayed only a short time."

"Tell your brother we are very grateful," the men acknowledged the gift of ice. "May his shadow never grow less!"

The iced drink was refreshing and found favor with Mustapha Khan, who sipped the *sherbat* slowly, thoughtfully, as if he were mentally reviewing the tasks he had planned for this visit.

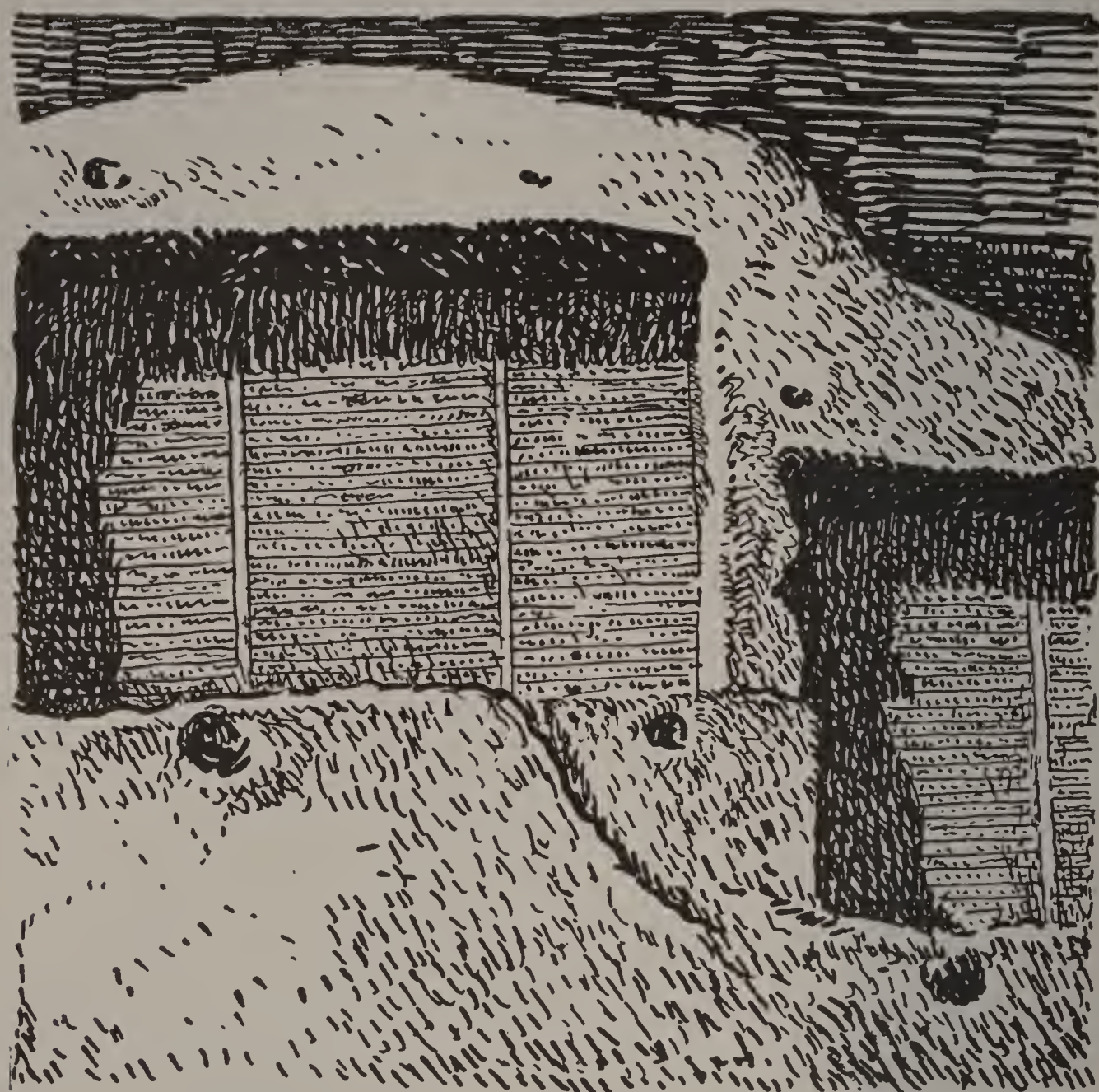
"I shall return in the month of Saffar to collect my crop shares and the rest of the rents," he informed the *kadkhoda* when they were once more alone. "Have the rents ready from the *dokans*, the shops, and the taxes for sheep and oxen and donkeys, and the proceeds from the timber rights. The government at Teheran is raising my taxes; so I must increase the returns from the village. If there are any other matters to settle, let me

hear them now, for I want to leave early in the morning."

"There are none," Abdullah replied.

"It is well. And remember that you know nothing of the vase which I found. You know nothing and you have seen nothing."





XI

GANJ NAMEH—TREASURE WRITING

Happy as had been that visit to Tuhistan, to Farrukh, upon her return home its memory was only the harbinger of greater happiness yet to come. Little by little now her first glad hope—too good, it seemed, to be true—had grown to certainty. Whether or no the wise Stone Lion had anything to do with it, her dearest wish was to be granted, her cup of happiness would be full.

Not long after she and Mustapha Khan were once

more settled in their own house, Farrukh confided to her husband the secret which now filled all her thoughts.

“It will be a man-child, of course,” Mustapha Khan commented, vastly pleased.

“*Insh’allah*, if God wills, it will be a man-child,” his wife agreed.

“And we will make a picnic of rejoicing on Friday when I do not go to the office to work!” her husband continued. “We can take some books and read. Shall we go to Ganj Nameh?”

“As you wish. You know that I have never visited the places on this side of the mountain.”

“But surely you have heard of the wonders of Ganj Nameh! No? Then that is where we shall go.”

The secluded glen known as Ganj Nameh, or the Treasure Writing, of which Mustapha Khan spoke, lies high above Hamadan in the foothills of the Elvend range. A rocky trail—it can scarcely be called a road—struggles upward through the delightful summer gardens of the *khangs*, beyond the blooming orchards that fill the ravine, up and up to the region that shows no trace of the gardener, of carefully laid irrigation trenches, or affectionately tended rows of poplar trees; far beyond all cultivation to the wild, unkempt slopes of the majestic Elvend. Between two great peaks is a rugged valley through which a seasonal brook leaps over rocky cliffs into foaming cataracts, spreads itself out on

a wide, pebbly bed, or frets its way around gigantic boulders that all but halt its progress.

A narrow, sandy donkey path follows the stream along its lonely course. Here one seldom sees the shepherd with his little flock, or even a lone peasant in search of grass for his donkeys. Everywhere are piles of stones collected by previous travelers for some later wanderer who might be so unfortunate as to meet the Devil in this lonely spot.

But what is today a little-frequented donkey path was once a great highway, over which twenty-five centuries ago Darius the Great transported his armies through the rocky mountain pass, and by which traveled the royal messengers bearing orders to the satraps in all the provinces from Ethiopia to India. Through the centuries the pass was used less and less until the road disappeared altogether, an earthquake finally filling the narrowest part of the defile with gigantic boulders from the slopes above, until today only a footpath remains to guide the curious traveler.

Up this narrow track, on the following Friday, Farrukh and her husband toiled, with Farrukh's sure-footed little donkey bearing the saddlebags packed with bread and cheese and dates, with charcoal and a small samovar and with books. A small coarse rug was folded on top of the saddlebags.

Soon, the rug was spread on the ground, a tiny charcoal fire made in the samovar, the teapot steaming and

the cheese and dates laid ready in a pile on top of the sheet of thin, brown bread.

“Go ahead, Mustapha,” Farrukh announced, as she sat down on the rug. “When I dipped water for the samovar from the spring that comes up by the big rock yonder, I found some watercress. Put it with your bread and cheese.”

The exertion of the climb had made them hungry and they ate for several minutes in silence. Then Mustapha Khan glanced at his book, which lay open on the rug, and spoke.

“It must have been such as this when the poet wrote his verses. You know something of Hafiz and Sa’adi and Firdusi. We have another poet, Omar Khayyam, one of the lesser poets, who is known chiefly as a mathematician and philosopher.

“The verse of his that came to my mind is something like this:

*‘Here with a Loaf of Bread beneath the Bough,
A Flask of Wine, a Book of Verse—and Thou
Beside me singing in the Wilderness—
And Wilderness is Paradise enow.’”*

Mustapha Khan read on, verse after verse, now reciting “*the Potter thumping his wet Clay*,” and now “*so red the rose as where some dying Caesar bled*”; here the pleasures in Wine, and there a questioning about the Hereafter.

“While you read of wine, your tea cools and grows bitter,” Farrukh remarked practically. “It seems to me this man Omar is a heretic. He lauds the Grape; the Koran forbids us to drink that which intoxicates. He jests about Death, saying it is nothing more than a return of our bodies to the dust; and the Prophet has assured us that if we pray and fast and give alms, and if we are true Believers, we shall attain Paradise.”

“So it would seem on first reading,” Mustapha Khan conceded, “but I believe he writes in symbols. His words have a deeper meaning than that which strikes the ear. Perhaps that is because he was first of all a great philosopher.”

“While you were reading,” Farrukh confessed, “I noticed that rock which towers above us across the brook has a flat panel cut into it. Do you see? It looks like writing. What is it?”

“That is Ganj Nameh. This little glen receives its name from that rock carving. Shall we cross the brook and climb up there and have a look at it?”

Only by scrambling onto a huge boulder could they pull themselves up to the ledge made by the sunken panel. Small round holes dotted the surface of the rocky wall, presumably made for pegs to support the scaffolding while the sculptor chiseled his writing into the rock.

“What strange writing! It is not the kind the *mirza* taught me. That had flowing curves and this has short, sharp lines—like chicken tracks,” Farrukh remarked

laughingly and ran her finger lightly over the curious characters. "It is cut so deep, so sharp and clear, this writing must have been done only a few years ago."

"Twenty-five hundred years would be a better guess," Mustapha Khan told her. "This writing was done by order of the Great King, Darius. You see, there are three panels of writing, in three very ancient languages, but they were all written with the same characters, which are called cuneiform. This is really a proclamation glorifying the old god Ahuramazda and announcing that Darius was the King of Kings. It was carved on this rock because this place used to be a great highway, and the many men who passed by would read it.

"Then you see another rock nearby. It has a panel like this one. The writing is almost the same, too. King Xerxes thought he would make a proclamation like that of his father, Darius. So he had the other copied and substituted his own name each time.

"When I was a schoolboy, the headmaster of the foreign school brought us here for a picnic. He was a very learned man, and was familiar with cuneiform writing. He showed us the marks that were the symbols for Darius. We boys made a tiny mark beside the first character so we would remember. See! Here it is! This is the way they wrote Darius:



Darius

or, as it was pronounced by his contemporaries, Darayavaush.

“That great boulder which juts out so close to the stream also has a panel prepared on it for writing. But nothing has ever been inscribed on it. There is a great crevice through the center and half the rock has dropped down a finger’s length, caused by an earthquake, probably, so that the work was never finished.”

“But, Mustapha, why is this place called Ganj Nameh? If it only proclaims the glories of the Great King Darius, why do people speak of it as the Treasure Writing?”

“Jasmine! Jasmine! Such questions as you ask! A scholar without diligence is a lover without money. You should be a man and use that fine mind of yours for something worth while.

“I will tell you why it is called Ganj Nameh. After a time those ancient languages of Susian, Babylonian, and Old Persian died out and finally no one could read this inscription. For a long, long time people thought it gave directions for locating great buried treasure, if anyone could but decipher it. And then a few years ago a foreigner studied it out and discovered that it was but a proclamation of Darius reciting the extent of his empire and the list of his high-sounding titles.

“Here!” he said, pulling a book from the saddlebag, for they had recrossed the stream by this time. “I will read a translation of the characters on the rock panel:

'A great god is Ahuramazda, who created this earth, who created yonder heaven, who created man, who made peace for man, who made Darius king, the one king of many, the one ruler of many. I am Darius, the Great King, the King of Kings, King of the countries which have many peoples, King of the great earth even to afar, the son of Hystaspes, the Achaemenian.'

"Three hours until sunset," Mustapha Khan estimated a little later, as he glanced toward the sun. "We must start down the mountain. Pack the saddlebags quickly while I fetch the donkey."

The return journey was slow and Farrukh became very tired. When they finally reached Saidabad, where the trail widened into a real road and a tea house catered to picnickers, Mustapha Khan spied a *droshky*. Leaving the donkey to be driven home by a boy, they climbed into the carriage and relaxed against the cushioned seat as they jogged along toward the city.

In the Street of The Mulberry Trees, he paid off the driver and knocked on his own great gate. Mahmud opened it quickly, furtively.

A police officer stepped out of the gatehouse.

"Mustapha Khan Azadai?" he asked.

"I am your slave," the Khan replied, wondering if the Chief of Finance had sent the man on an errand for him.

"I have orders for your arrest."

"For my arrest? What do you mean? On what charges?"

"I do not know. You will come with me at once to the Chief of Police."

Farrukh clutched her husband frantically.

"What are they going to do to you? Mustapha, tell me what has happened. What have you done?" She began to cry hysterically.

"Make not a fool of yourself," her husband shook her off roughly. "There is a mistake somewhere. I have done nothing. I have nothing to fear. Washermen beat only dirty clothes against a stone. Go to your room and be quiet. I will return presently." He went into the street, followed by the police officer.

But he did not return. Farrukh waited anxiously until long after the *mullah* had called the Faithful to their sunset prayers. She sat on the floor, not troubling to unroll the mattress, and listening to every footfall on the cobblestones in the street. She heard a *mullah* singing the midnight prayer, and a farmer boisterously warbling a folk song as he stumbled away from the city from a too long visit to a public tea house. And still Mustapha Khan did not return.

Alone, with fear clutching at her heart, Farrukh passed those hours of darkness. It seemed as though morning would never come. She was tormented by thoughts of her husband being tortured in jail, of perhaps being hurried to another city altogether, thrust into

some dungeon where he might linger for months, and she would have no news of him. All a simple country girl's horror of the law and its dread despotic powers rushed back to her, overwhelming what common sense and knowledge she had gained in the months since her marriage. What could have brought this catastrophe about? Was it due to some plot, some hidden jealousy?

Slowly the dawn grew, a pale daylight crept through the windows, and the *mullah* was again singing the call to prayer. As Farrukh's first terrors calmed she was able to think more clearly. Little by little past events began for the first time to link themselves together in her mind. Farrukh was no fool; things like this did not happen without some cause, and once that little glimmer of a possible explanation occurred to her, her brain began to work feverishly, piecing together the whole story.

Abbas, the father of her little weaver, stealthily hanging about for the child's wages, furtive and mysterious about his own affairs, as she knew from Mahmud, and frequently smelling of opium; Abbas and the Colonel riding together in the droshky; Abbas—she was almost sure—among those men she discovered on the Musallah hill; the warning letter delivered to her, and Mustapha Khan's remarks about opium smuggling as they rode past the poppy fields on their way to Tuhistan.

"They have indeed trumped up false charges to get him out of the way," she sobbed to herself. "They think I have told him what I saw, and that he will work

through the office of the Tax Collector to break up the ring and catch them. Mustapha said they had a smuggler in his office the other day, but they could not produce enough evidence against him. It is all my fault! It is my fault that he is in trouble. If only I had stayed on the road and not wandered off to explore those ruins. But how can I tell Mustapha? If I tell him what I know, how I came to discover it, he will say that no good woman would wander alone on the hillside. And then he will divorce me. Dirt on my head! Oh, the grief that I eat!" She rocked on her heels, beating her breast.

Her thoughts raced on. Yes, it was through her that this trouble had fallen upon Mustapha Khan. He was in danger on her account. She would go to the jail and tell him everything. He must know who his possible enemies were, even if it meant divorce and disgrace.

She bathed her swollen face in the cool water of the garden pool and was thankful for the black veil that hid her reddened eyes and distorted face as she hurried through the streets.

The police officer looked up in surprise as a woman entered the room.

"If it is not too much trouble, may I speak to Mustapha Khan?" she spoke timidly behind the veil.

"That cannot be. Mustapha Khan is a prisoner. I have orders to let him speak to no one," the man replied.

A coin flashed in her hand.

"But I will see what can be done," he finished.



XII

DONKEY HARNESS

Mustapha Khan listened at first indifferently, then in amazement to his wife's confession. As she told her story, the events seemed to be logically related and he almost believed her conclusion himself.

"It may be that you are on the trail of that which we ourselves could not solve," he admitted reluctantly. "Still, that is not the reason for my arrest.

"While I was in the village, I dug up a vase full of

old gold coins that had been buried in the *qan'at*. No one else knew of it except your father, and I commanded him to speak of it to no man, for I knew it would mean trouble if the news got out. But the police department has heard of it. And here I am, the sacrifice."

"How did they find out?"

"Your father knew."

"My father is discreet; he would not disclose that which he knew should remain secret."

"Nevertheless, he is the only one who knew." Mustapha Khan could not prevent a touch of bitterness creeping into his voice. "If he has been indiscreet, I shall remove him from the village and he can go out and tend sheep."

"My father did not speak! I think someone else must have shared your secret, and that person has a grudge against you," Farrukh maintained stoutly. "I don't want my father to be discharged. I shall discover who told the secret. But why do they imprison you because you dug up an old vase in your *qan'at*?"

"It is the law that everything beneath the surface of the soil belongs to the government. And I did not immediately report my find. Yesterday, while we were at Ganj Nameh, they searched the house and garden and found the vase deep down in the rice jar where I thought it would be safe."

Farrukh was dumbfounded to think that a precious treasure had been hidden in her rice jar without her

knowledge. If only she had shared the secret, how much better she would have hidden that vase!

"Now that they have the vase, why do they not let you go?"

"Yes, why don't they? They say the vase held thirty pieces of gold, instead of nineteen, and I must produce eleven more coins before I am freed. But where can I find eleven gold coins? We do not use gold money today. The vase contained only nineteen and I am unable to convince them it contained no more."

"Do the nineteen coins fill the vase? Surely that would be proof of your truthfulness!"

"No! Strangely enough, the vase had space for a few more coins, and that is their chance to squeeze money from me. I cannot give them gold coins like those in the vase. The only thing I can do is to give them the equivalent in silver. That would be about one hundred and fifty *tomans*."

"One hundred and fifty *tomans*! But that is a fortune! How can you ever get so much?"

"From the rents I collected in the village, there are a hundred *tomans*. For the other fifty . . . I don't know. Perhaps the Tax Collector will advance that much on my salary until I can collect the rest of the rents in the harvest season.

"Farrukh, do you wrap your veil very closely about you and go to him. Tell him my trouble and ask him

if he will help me, if he will come here. Surely his great authority can do much."

When Farrukh appeared before him in his office, the Tax Collector listened attentively to her story. Farrukh also told him her belief that someone had brought about the arrest in order to place Mustapha Khan in a bad light with the government, someone who had reason to fear him. And she related the incidents which had led up to her receipt of the threatening letter.

"Where is the letter now?" the man asked sharply.

Farrukh laid the letter before him. "I brought it with me. I thought Mustapha Khan might need it, but he seemed to think it was unimportant."

"I will keep it," the official announced, after examining it closely. "It may help to clear up a case we have been working on. If you receive any more such letters, give them to the Khan and tell him to bring them to me. Oh, yes! Now I'll go to the jail and see what I can do for the young man."

One weight had been lifted from her heart, only to be replaced by another. The official could procure Mustapha's release. But what of her father? Had he disclosed the secret? If he had, she felt sure her husband would fulfill his threat and remove Abdullah from his position of authority in the village. And what could she, a woman, do to defend her father?

"You should be a man and use that fine mind of yours for something worth while," her husband had

remarked at Ganj Nameh. Had he been joking, or was he in earnest?

Oh, if she were only a man now, that she might go about freely and try to solve this mystery! Mustapha Khan had been displeased, as she knew he would be, and had reprimanded her for wandering on the Musallah hill alone. So she must now lay all her plans carefully and work more circumspectly.

First of all, she must discover who told the news about the vase, in order to clear her father. Then she must try to learn more about this group of men who had sent her the warning. If she could gain specific information, Mustapha Khan might clear up that case and receive credit for it, which would restore him to favor with the government. Yes, this was her task and she must not fail.

Seeking relief from the afternoon heat, Farrukh had taken her needlework to the Room of The Cascades and was sitting cross-legged on a carpeted bench watching the water splash over the rocks. Then it dimpled in the cool, dark pool and flowed out in a narrow, rock-rimmed channel to the garden, where Mahmud was busily directing its course from one level to another. Three days a week they rented an hour of irrigation water, and Mahmud was kept busy opening and closing the miniature dikes as each little plot overflowed with the precious water.

A sharp knock on the street gate shattered the lazy

afternoon quiet. Mahmud flung open the gate and in trotted the ice carrier's donkey resplendent in a new set of handwoven carpet harness.

"*Mashallah!*" exclaimed the gatekeeper. "How is it that your beast wears bright new harness when I must wear my black shirt? Is it not *Muharram*, the Month of Mourning?"

"*Muharram* it is," replied the ice carrier. "But it is not all mourning. My brother in the village had a little luck. He asked me to change a gold coin in the city and then he gave me part of it as a present. So the donkey got the harness and I got a new pipe. Should we mourn for that?"

More chaffing followed. But Farrukh, unnoticed in the Room of The Cascades, had heard enough. His brother in the village had had a gold coin! He had been afraid to change it in the village and had sent it away.

When the gate closed on the man and his beast, Farrukh called to the gatekeeper.

"Next time that man comes here, ask him where he bought the harness. I want a set just like it for my own donkey. Do not tell him your mistress wants to know. Merely ask who the harness maker was who did such excellent work."

Mustapha Khan came home that evening irritable and uncommunicative. How the release had been arranged he would not say, but it was plain that he blamed her

family for the trouble, with more than a little angry resentment for her.

Anxiety racked her mind and body for a night and day. Rebellion rose within her each time she thought of her husband's lack of faith in her father, while terror clutched her heart as she feared for Abdullah. Then Mahmud came to her with information. The harness maker was one Mushi, who had his shop in the leather-workers' bazaar. He had come from Tuhistan in his youth and had been a close friend of the ice carrier ever since their boyhood days in the village.

Timidly Farrukh approached her husband on the dangerous subject.

"My lord, I have news for you. I know where you might find a gold coin in the bazaar."

In spite of his resentment toward his wife and his bitterness for her family, he could not but recognize and admire the persevering, searching, truth-hungry quality of her mind.

It was nearly sunset. The bazaar would be closing soon, but he could go down early in the morning. He debated. To hold counsel with women was bad. Should he listen to his wife and eat more trouble, or ignore the clue and struggle along trying to straighten out his difficulties alone? The ice carrier's brother was Abdullah's servant in the village. Surely such evidence could not be ignored even though coming from a woman. He took the chance.

Camel trappings, leather fringes for horse and mule, bells and harness and saddles dangled in confusion from the walls of the stall of old Mushi in the covered bazaar. Mushi sat cross-legged on the floor, threading bright blue beads onto the ends of narrow leather thongs for harness fringe. On each side of the dim, vaulted alley were other harness makers industriously improving their stock or lazily watching for customers.

Mustapha Khan sauntered along the way, looking at the wares of all the leather shops along the street. At old Mushi's he paused.

"What kind of harness have you for a traveler's donkey?"

Mushi reached here and there, laid down before the man a set of shiny leather harness brass-studded, a set of carpet strips cleverly fashioned into harness, and then hopefully exhibited a pair of saddlebags, a quantity of blue clay beads, little brass bells, and an assortment of iron goads—all the accessories for a well-equipped donkey.

The customer cast an indifferent glance at the carpet harness, but showed interest in the brass-studded set.

"Now, this set," he pointed to the leather, "is much better made than that. Woven harness is not in great demand today, is it?"

"Your pardon, master, but it is very well made. And I have already sold three sets of carpet harness since the day of Jume'h."



"Three sets! I cannot imagine who would buy them."

“Three sets! I cannot imagine who would buy them.”

“One I sold to a *mullah*, one to a foreigner, and one to an ice carrier.”

“And how many *tomans* do you ask for a set like this? How could an ice carrier pay for it?”

“Only three *tomans*, master. That ice carrier even gave me a gold coin in payment.”

“Marvelous! He must be a prince in disguise. I should like to see a gold coin once. I am certainly not rich enough to carry gold.”

“Indeed, master, I should be pleased to show it you, for it was a curious coin. The face was not that of our present Shah. But I no longer have it. My son was called for military service only a few days ago. I went to the Committee of Enrollment to try to secure his leave of absence for a year. My children are many, and I need the boy Safar Ali to help me in the shop until the next boy Rajab is old enough to take his place. I cannot feed so many mouths alone.

“So I went to the Committee. *Bah! bah!* It would seem that every man in Hamadan wanted to see the colonel that day. The room was crowded and I might have cooled my heels there until sunset. But I spoke privately to a clerk and made him a present of the coin. Very soon afterward I made my petition to the colonel and he granted my boy leave of absence for a year. So it was well worth expending the coin.

“Now, master, which set would you like? You are

my first customer this morning and, if I sell to you, it will bring me luck. Say your price."

The customer, however, could not make up his mind. The brass was too heavy; the fabric, too light. The goads were not sharp enough, and the bells were too large.

A look of suspicion clouded old Mushi's face. His eyes narrowed and he spoke sharply.

"Agha, what do you want? You came not to buy. What have I done that spies should be set upon me? First the colonel himself from the Committee of Enrollment comes to my shop and pretends to look at harness while he engages me in many words. And now you do the same. It is true that my family is large, that I need my eldest son in the shop. I did not picture my condition falsely. So what is your mission?"

Before the man could make reply, an uproar filled the narrow alley.

"Thief! Thief! Catch him! Seize him!"

Two policemen darted through the gathering throng, shouting, "Down that turning! Quick, before we lose sight of him!" And a ragged beggar fled in terror before the pursuing officers. In the confusion, Mustapha Khan melted into the crowd and soon disappeared.

"So!" he mused. "By some strange fate, the colonel himself saw that coin and recognized it as a rare specimen. Learning from that garrulous fool in the bazaar that it came from Tuhistan, he must have set his spies

to work. If Abdullah has been gossiping, it would be easy enough to put two and two together. But why should he have a grudge against me?"

For it was clear that this alone could have been the motive behind it all. Mustapha Khan remembered what Farrukh had said about seeing the colonel and Abbas together that day in the bazaar. So Abbas was mixed up in this too. Queer company for the colonel to be keeping! Yes, there was more behind this than met the eye; undoubtedly the colonel was responsible for his arrest, for only an official as powerful as he could have demanded a secret search of anyone's property during his absence.

"I thought you would find that the colonel was involved in this," the Head of Finance said without surprise, when he heard the story of the harness maker. "That warning note the *khanoum* received was written on paper which bore a special watermark. It looked as if it had been torn hurriedly from the bottom of a paper that had been carried in a pocket. The watermark you too would have seen and recognized, if you had but examined it. You have eyes only for your law books, Mustapha Khan. If you are to be of any great value to me in this office, especially in the collection of internal revenue, you will have to develop your faculty of observation. A traveler without knowledge is a bird without wings. What then is a seeker after clues, if he be without eyes?"

Mustapha Khan accepted the rebuke silently. "But there is still another thing which puzzles me," he frowned. "Where did the ice carrier or his brother in Tuhistan pick up the coin? Can it be that the *kadkhoda* found some loose coins when he went back to the *qan'at*, and never informed me?" And Mustapha Khan was more determined than ever to remove Abdullah when he returned to collect harvest rents in midsummer.





XIII

THE PEDDLER'S VISIT

During these days, the thought of Mustapha Khan's suspicion against her father hung over Farrukh's mind like a dark cloud. Though she was sure in her heart that Abdullah had not been guilty of indiscretion—for it was not in his character—it was only too apparently quite another matter to persuade her husband of his innocence.

She was no longer concerned over her husband's attitude as regarded herself. For ever since the Head of

Finance had complimented her intelligence in recognizing the importance of the note as a clue, Mustapha had shown no further resentment toward her. Nor did he by word of mouth reveal his bitterness toward her father. But she felt this family trouble as an unseen barrier between them, as family troubles are apt to be. Nor did it better matters that Mustapha's mother, Mas'udeh Khanoum, had taken to visiting their house more often, of late. Farrukh had always felt in awe of her mother-in-law, and just now she dreaded her constant criticism and her sharp tongue more than ever.

Such was the state of affairs when the time of Muharram arrived, the yearly celebration when the Persian people commemorate, with prayer and public mourning, the tragic betrayal and death of their leader Hossein, grandson of the Prophet and son of Ali. A passion play had been presented in the city; Farrukh and her mother-in-law had attended a series of the performances in a neighboring garden, and it was on their return to the house one afternoon that Mas'udeh Khanoum took it into her head to inspect Farrukh's rugmaking. It was past sunset and the weavers had departed. On the vertical wooden looms were the rugs, now nearly finished, their vivid hues mellowed in the failing light and the flowers and leaves of the design smoldering like gems in a background of midnight blue.

Mas'udeh Khanoum peered at the back of a rug and along its side, estimated the knots per square inch, stud-

ied the pattern pinned to the loom, looked for mistakes in the weaving, broke off a bit of wool that dangled from a ball suspended above the loom, and calculated with sensitive fingers the quality of the wool.

"The border across the top runs crooked," she remarked briefly. "You will have to pound the knots closer together to keep your lines straight. And there is a two-tone streak near the bottom. Did you not dye the wool before you began?"

"All," Farrukh declared. "But that flaw came about in the month of Ramazon. The master weaver explained to me. Little Osra was so sleepy she made a finger's length of knots in the wrong color and then went on beyond that part before they discovered the mistake.

"The master weaver wished to leave the row as it was. With at least one flaw, the rug would fall short of perfection and thus ward off the Evil Eye." Farrukh waited hopefully for a word of praise, of commendation for the excellent dyeing of the wool, for the tightly formed knots, for the straight sides, for the choice of design and color arrangement.

"Humph!" Mas'udeh concluded. "It has enough flaws to ward off seven Evil Eyes."

"Her own family is faultless," Farrukh thought resentfully. "I am nothing but a daughter by marriage. I should not have expected to please her. She doubted my ability when I first set up the looms. What shall I do when she comes to spend the summer with us in the

hills? Then I shall be nothing but a servant, and she the mistress."

In the next few weeks the weavers finished the borders, clipped the warp threads, and fastened the fringe. The knots were counted and the workers paid off and sent home. The master weavers remained a day longer to spread the rugs on the ground outdoors and scrape the surface with a sharp iron instrument which removed the corduroy ridges and left the nap velvety smooth.

At length, Mahmud carried the rugs to the house and ceremoniously spread them in the receiving room. "*Mobarak bashad!* May they be blessed!" he wished the proud possessor of the two new rugs.

Mustapha Khan eyed the work critically, secretly pleased by his wife's industry and expert supervision.

"How much do you think they will fetch in the bazaar? Enough to pay for the wool?"

"The fish-and-diamond *dozari* should bring twenty and five *tomans*, and I think the other should bring forty. It is more finely woven and the border is not crooked at the end, as is the fish-and-diamond." With much labor, Farrukh had kept account of the cost of wool and the wages paid her weavers so that she now knew exactly what her expense had been.

"Sixty and five *tomans!*" Mustapha Khan exclaimed. "That will be more than enough to reimburse the Head of Finance for his loan to me. I will arrange for their selling in the bazaar tomorrow."

So that was how Mustapha's release had been accomplished! Farrukh's mind quickly seized upon the revelation; and as quickly, then, she succumbed to despair at her husband's decision.

"And will I not receive any of the money to buy more wool in the autumn?" Overwhelming disappointment choked the words in her throat.

"I shall take what I need," her husband replied.

Faced with a solution, through his wife's industry, of his own financial difficulties, Mustapha gave no slightest thought to the Western ideas regarding women which he so admired. Farrukh had not been required to establish the weaving room; it had been her pleasure to supervise the work. Truly, she had reason to expect a small share in the profit. But she was only a woman; her disappointment should not matter. The money was his to use as he chose.

Furthermore, was it not her own father who had brought all this trouble upon him? He would not have had a fine to pay had Abdullah been discreet. So it was only fair that he should take the profit from his wife's work. Thus the man reasoned, in customary Persian fashion.

The summer days became long and hot. The poppies grew tall and flowered into blooms of white and rose and mauve. Then the petals began to fall in white showers and guards appeared in the fields to watch the precious crop as the seed pods swelled with milky fluid.

There came a day when the opium workers went into the gray-green fields with sharp, three-blade instruments and with dexterous strokes slit the pods until the milky liquid oozed out.

Next morning when the fluid had thickened to a wax, they carefully scraped it off and made another set of slits in the pods. Each day the wax, which was now opium, was removed and the pods slit until nine or twelve scars appeared on the pods. Some few chose to make the greater number, believing it to be an auspicious number inasmuch as they recognized twelve *Imams*, successors to the Prophet, in their religion.

When all the wax had been extracted, the seeds were removed and pressed into dough for little cakes or fed to fretful babies. Then the plants were pulled up by the roots, dried and used for fuel. Thus, only the petals were actually wasted and even they in full bloom—sinister though their beauty was—charmed the traveler along a hot, dusty road.

Farrukh grew restive in the midday heat and longed to move up to the hills, even though Mas'udeh Khanoum was to accompany them and would, therefore, rule the household.

"How many more days will it be," she complained to her husband, "until we shall see the green leaves of the fruit trees in the *Darreh* and hear the rushing of the little streams? The heat in this city is like that of Gehenna. Only the nights are sufferable, and then only

if we make our bed on the roof. And I can scarcely ply the needle as I hem garments for the baby. Do let us go soon."

"A few more days," her husband would respond. "You know this is a busy time for us. The Bureau of Internal Revenue does most of its business at this season of the year. When the opium has been harvested and made up into cylindrical packages, it must be brought to our office, weighed and stamped and sealed with official paper and properly recorded. We buy all the opium crop and then resell it in the bazaar. It cannot be bought and sold even in one single transaction until it bears the government mark. That is the reason we must work early and late while the crop is being harvested, and that is the reason I cannot take even a day to move the household up to the hills."

Farrukh remembered the early morning ride along the poppy fields as they had ridden to Tuhistan.

"But you say that some men do not register their opium, but sell it secretly to agents who smuggle it out of the country?" she pondered. "How easy it would be to carry a donkey-load of it across the mountain on some *charvadar* trail that none but a shepherd knew or could follow! Your agents would have great trouble catching such a smuggler."

Farrukh held hard feeling toward the smugglers of *tariaḳ*, not so much for their evasion of the law as because their activities made it necessary for her husband

to work long days in the office when she wanted to go to the hills. Only the Room of The Cascades was cool and there she spent much of her time.

A peddler slipped inside the garden one day when the gate had been left ajar. Annoyed at first by the intrusion, Farrukh quickly pulled the veil across her face and called out sharply to the stranger. Then, seeing the bundle he carried over his shoulder, she asked curiously, "What do you want?" The peddler might provide diversion for an otherwise monotonous afternoon.

"Many beautiful things I have, lady. Let me open my bundle." He knelt before her on the cobblestones, untying knots in the kerchief and spreading his trinkets at her feet.

Farrukh gave an involuntary cry of delight at sight of the lovely objects, a most unwise thing to do if one really were interested in making a purchase.

"Lady, look at this embroidery. See the delicate colors. The flash of brightness is gold thread. It is very old, an antique. And this one—the flowers are all of silver thread. Feel the weight of the cloth. Such embroidery is not made today. I go among all the villages on the plain and in these hills and find the best that people have to offer."

Farrukh fingered a beaded bag, a flat black stone on which was graven a charm copied from the holy Koran, a tiny silver fish with a slender rod thrust through its head and a hollow body to hold and apply mascara.

The girl sighed regretfully.

"I have no money."

"No money! A *khanoum* who weaves rugs in her factory surely has a few *krans* to buy a pretty bag or a little silver trinket."

"But the rugs are not yet sold. I have no money, I say."

"Perhaps, if I should return in a few days, the rugs will be sold and you will take the little fish?"

"In a few days? No, in a very few days—two or three, *insh'allah*—we shall be going to our summer garden and I shall not be in the city again until autumn."

The peddler continued to hold up first one curio and then another. With a sigh of resignation, he finally gathered up the treasures, knotted the opposite corners of the kerchief together, and lifted the bundle to his shoulders.





XIV

A GIFT OF BREAD

“Yonder peasant has full saddlebags,” Mustapha Khan chuckled to his wife as they jogged over the donkey trail to their summer garden, “so full he can scarcely balance himself on his donkey. How I should like to see him tumble off!”

Farrukh studied the figure intently.

“It is the peddler,” she decided. “He came into the garden yesterday afternoon and had some pretty trinkets

—a little silver fish . . .” she recollected. “It was just before you came home. And when you came in so unexpectedly and said to make haste and pack the saddlebags, that we were going to the *Darreh* today, I forgot about him in the excitement.”

Then she related all the details of his visit, the tantalizing objects in his bundle, his offer to come back when she had money from the sale of the rugs.

“It was such a pretty little silver fish to hold mascara. I wanted it for my beauty box,” she concluded wistfully.

“Jasmine is a vain child,” Mustapha teased his wife. “Perhaps she remembers a story from the poet Sa’adi: ‘An old woman had stained her gray locks black. I said to her: Oh, my antiquated dame! Thy hair I admit thou canst turn dark by art, but thou never canst make thy crooked back straight.’ ”

Mas’udeh Khanoum, who was riding close by, sniffed disdainfully. Her son’s wife might be able to read ten books and quote a hundred lines of poetry, but she had not yet learned her place. She should be riding behind her husband instead of beside him, and riding silently instead of conversing with him like another man.

“And how did the peddler know you had rugs to sell?” he asked sharply.

“That I know not,” Farrukh replied in astonishment, as she realized that it had been the peddler who first mentioned them.

“Perhaps your tongue is longer than your memory,”

her mother-in-law reminded her tartly, "like others in your family."

So Mustapha had mentioned to his mother his suspicion of Abdullah!

Would it be like this all summer, Farrukh wondered bitterly? Mas'udeh had been kind to her at first, but since Mustapha's recent trouble with the police she had laid aside the pose of friendliness and become openly hostile. Many a bride began married life in the home of her husband's mother and had to endure this torment for years before going into a separate home. She, Farrukh, had been unusually fortunate to be mistress of her own home from the first and now found it exceedingly difficult to refrain from reply.

Mustapha Khan pointed to the distant rider.

"Look! Look! The man has seen us, but he likes not our company. See! He is leading the donkey down to that clump of willows by the brook. *Ajab!* He is dumping the saddlebags among the low seedlings. And now he jumps on the donkey and dashes across the field. *Ajab!* How he goads it! Whither is he bound that he leaves the trail in such haste?"

The peddler fled over the hill and was lost to sight. Mustapha Khan kicked his donkey with both heels.

"Wait for me at the brook," he shouted, already several yards ahead of the rest of the party. From among the willows he dragged out the heavy saddlebags and jerked them open.



The peddler fled over the hills

"Opium!" he exclaimed in astonishment, as a heavy, sweetish odor filled his nostrils. "And he carried his crop in the wrong direction—from the city, instead of to the government office. So! He must belong to a smuggling ring! Somewhere in these hills they secretly refine it into commercial form and smuggle it down to the gulf. There must be a greater quantity elsewhere, if he risked the loss of even this considerable amount."

The other travelers were already waiting, when Mustapha Khan dragged the saddlebags up to the trail.

"Here, Mahmud!" he motioned to the servant. "Load these bags on my donkey. Your own beast is so heavily laden with household goods he can carry no more. And don't stand there sniffing like a cat!"

The party finally reached the summer garden. Like many other summer places, it was surrounded by orchards and was far distant from other houses. With a natural privacy already provided, it was necessary to have low stone walls only high enough to serve as boundary lines. No gate was needed in this rustic abode.

Mustapha Khan led the way up the lane. In front of the house he stopped.

"The door stands open! The cellar storerooms are unlocked!" he cried in amazement. He ran up the steps.

"Someone has been here . . . has just left," he announced to the others, who were now close on his heels. "Here is a samovar, still hot."

A rapid search of the house and garden revealed other

items left in the hurried departure—a pipe, a wheat sack, a small wooden spatula.

“Master, where shall I tether the donkeys?” Mahmud wanted to know. “The storeroom which you always use for a stable contains supplies. Will you come and see? It smells of *tariak*.”

And, indeed, there in the manger was another bag of opium. This, Mustapha Khan found upon examination, had been expertly kneaded and molded into the standard cylindrical form for commercial use.

“So this was their trick, to use my own garden as their hiding-place,” he frowned. “Last year they were unmolested because we did not use the garden. This year they were taken by surprise and left part of their equipment in their sudden flight.”

The members of this daring ring had used for their base the very garden of one who worked in the revenue office, whose business it was to regulate the opium trade and track down offenders. They had relied upon the reputation of the owner of the garden to allay the suspicion of any person who might chance to see someone about the house. And they had watched Mustapha Khan’s movements closely to learn exactly when he would move up to the hills so that they could vanish in good time. Mustapha Khan would finish his work on the opium crop at the same time as the smugglers. Their plans synchronized perfectly.

Mahmud tethered the donkeys to poplar trees by the

irrigation stream which ran near the house, while Mustapha Khan wrote with swift, excited jabs a note to his chief. His face hardened into stern lines as he handed the letter to the servant.

“Carry this to the Head of the Department of Finance. You will not find him in the office today, but in his garden on the Street Kabobian. Give it to him and to no one else. Wait for an answer. It may be he will speak to you privately. But if he gives you a letter, hide it in your girdle and then return at once. If anyone speaks to you, tell them you go to get the charcoal you forgot—it might be well to bring a small quantity with you—but say nothing of this *tariaḳ* which was found. If you say even one word, you will ‘eat the sticks!’ ”

Mahmud blanched at mention of the bastinado and swore with alacrity and vehemence that he would pluck out his own tongue before he would reveal the secret.

Mustapha Khan and Farrukh sat down beside the rose bushes to hold council while the *ḳulfat* swept the rooms and disposed of the furnishings and food which had been brought up to the garden. Mas’udeh Khanoum superintended the work, much to Shokat’s grumbling disgust.

Scarcely had the two seated themselves by the bushes, when a man cautiously appeared around the corner of the house. It was Abbas. Catching sight of the couple seated on the ground, he turned to flee. Then, recog-

nizing them, he turned back again and came forward a few steps.

"Peace be with you!" he saluted gravely and held out the bundle he had been carrying under his arm. "The mother of Osra sends to the *khanoum* some bread which she baked on the stones only this morning. There is bread enough in the bundle to last several days." He bowed and hurried away while Mustapha Khan was still thanking him.

Farrukh unrolled the long strips of bread. "It is only bazaar bread; it is not home-made," she whispered to her husband.

"I don't believe he ever brought this for a gift," Mustapha quickly interposed. "You said he always used to wait for Osra's wages. He is the kind who is so stingy that if, in the place of his loaf of bread, the orb of the sun had been in his wallet, nobody would have seen daylight until the Day of Judgment."

Farrukh's imagination leaped to life.

"Mustapha! Mustapha! I have guessed it. He brings food to those men who hid themselves up here. He did not know we had come and that they had vanished. He gave us the bread, a gift, only to save his face."

"There he is now, loitering in the far end of the garden, probably wondering where to look for his friends," Mustapha said.

"Ho, there! Abbas! Come back! I would speak with you!"

Abbas turned and stood uncertainly for a full minute. Then he retraced his way with slow steps.

The Khan smiled with disarming friendliness upon the uneasy Abbas. "The *khanoum* says that the child Osra kept your family in food with her wages from the loom. Is it so?"

"It is true."

"And now that the weaving is finished for the summer, she is without work, and you have no occupation?"

"None, honorable master. It is hard to find work. The bazaars are already crowded with apprentices and porters and vendors."

"But you would like to have work?"

"Indeed, yes, master."

"Then I can help you. I shall need a man to bring food from the city several days a week and to take care of the alfalfa which grows in this garden."

"You are very kind," Abbas replied without enthusiasm.

"Two *krans* for each day that you work?"

"You are very generous. Let it be two *krans*," Abbas repeated. In his slow mind he was beginning to realize how he might serve two masters and make double wages. Then, whenever he was sent on a long journey to the south, he would merely fail to appear at the garden. He chuckled to himself as he went down the hillside, casting furtive glances along the way for some trace of his vanished companions.

"And now," concluded the young lawyer, when Abbas was finally out of sight, "I shall set a watch on that fool and he will lead me straight to his fellow smugglers. For I think he kept them informed of my movements so long as Osra worked at the loom. When the weaving was finished, your peddler was sent to spy on us and learn when we would leave the city."

"That is how he knew about the rugs," Farrukh exclaimed. "Abbas must have told him."

"Yes, and the peddler was on his way up here to tell them they had a few more days in which to load their supplies and move southward. They would have been gone, with every trace removed, but for this unexpected holiday which made it possible for me to bring you here today.

"This is great good luck for me to identify two members of the gang, if only inferiors, and to seize those bags of opium and a spatula for kneading the wax. Evidence and identification! They both speak loud before the law. The more the gardener prunes his vines, the more he adds to his crop of grapes. The Department of Finance will be delighted with this harvest, I can assure you!"





XV

TRIAL WITHOUT JURY

Long was Farrukh to remember the happenings of that night.

Twilight faded into dark—an inky blackness out here on the hills, for there was no moon to lighten the shadows. Farrukh and Mustapha sat waiting quietly on the verandah for Mahmud's return. Far-off sounds sounded sharply on the stillness, the bark of a distant dog, the rattle of pebbles under hoofs as a donkey passed on the road below. The evening drew on, and still Mahmud did not return. Mustapha grew impatient.

"If he has loitered on the way it will cost him dearly!" he muttered.

"Can any accident have happened?" Farrukh's voice was anxious.

"Not likely. He had only to deliver the letter and come straight back with the answer."

At last they could hear the sound of the donkey's hoofs, drawing gradually nearer up the hill path to the house. And with it, as they strained their ears, that of a man's footsteps, curiously slow and fumbling, pausing it seemed at every few steps as if to grope the way.

Mustapha caught up a lantern. By its yellow light, flickering across the garden, they could see Mahmud, walking close to the donkey's side as if for support, his hands tied behind him and his mouth gagged.

"Son of a burnt father! What is this?" Mustapha exclaimed angrily, dragging the gag from the servant's mouth and cutting the cord that bound his hands. "What has happened? Where is the message?"

"May I be your sacrifice, master, the *jinns* attacked me. Evil spirits they were that dragged me from the beast and mauled me on the ground. When I came to, I was as you saw me. By the help of Allah I got to my feet at last, and only by keeping close to this patient beast here could I make my way back. The message..." he felt in his disarranged girdle, "the *jinns* have eaten the message. It was tucked in my girdle. Now it is gone."

“Yes, the *jinns* ate the message. And you shall eat the sticks. You disobeyed . . .”

“Not the sticks, master!” Mahmud began to blubber. “Not the sticks! I kept your command. I told no one.”

“But you tarried in the town. Had you returned in broad day, this would not have happened.”

“Master, bid me do something else, but spare the sticks.”

“Very well!” The master withdrew threat of the bastinado. “Show me then how brave you are. There may be visitors tonight—unwelcome visitors—who wish to regain their opium. You and I shall sit here in the darkness and wait for them.”

The lantern was extinguished. At a word from her husband Farrukh had slipped back into the house, but she was too excited to seek her bed. Instead she crouched close to the window, listening, watching, while Mustapha softly questioned Mahmud about his visit. In whispers the servant described the interview, the Chief’s amazement as he read the letter, the swiftness with which he had penned a reply.

“But what did he say to you?” Mustapha Khan demanded desperately. “Have you no idea what he wrote?”

“Would I read that which was intended for my master?” Mahmud returned proudly. “Besides, you know that I cannot tell *aleph* from *bey*.”

Pondering the Chief’s possible message, Mustapha

Khan at last grew drowsy and settled himself against the house wall. How long he had slept he did not know. But he roused quickly when he felt Mahmud pressing his arm and whispering. "Hark! master, they have come!" He was trembling like a poplar leaf.

Mustapha Khan was fully awake in an instant, listening intently to the faint scratching sound that came from the stable door. Farrukh, alert within doors, heard it too.

"Good! They are without lights. They prefer the darkness, even when they fumble with the rusty padlock. So much the better for us! Now, Mahmud, be off!"

Mahmud padded away on bare feet. Yet, still as he was, the sensitive ears of the prowler must have caught a faint sound, for the suspicious scratching ceased.

For several minutes the listeners waited in suspense.

Scratch! Scrape! Click! The padlock fell apart. Farrukh could hear Mustapha Khan shout aloud:

"Ho, there! Lieutenant, surround the house with your men! We've got him this time. Quick!"

From the direction of the rosebushes a metallic whistle pierced the night. Mahmud was carrying out his secret orders.

"Scatter!" The command came low but clear. Twigs moved and crackled, bushes rustled; and a heavy club whacked the poplar tree near the corner of the house.

Frightened by the prospect of being caught, as they

thought, in a police trap, the prowler and his confederates fled pell-mell from the house, nor made any effort to prevent rattling stones from betraying the direction they had taken. Their one thought seemed to be to put distance between them and the house.

Faintly and still more faintly their retreat sounded down the hill and across the fields. When he was certain that the intruders had departed not to return again, Mustapha Khan whistled cautiously. In a moment bare feet padded across the verandah.

Mustapha Khan chuckled softly.

“Good work, Mahmud! You dashed back and forth so quickly you almost made me too believe there were a dozen men in the garden. What those fellows would have done had they known there were only two of us on guard might be a different story. I don’t think they will return tonight, and in the morning the opium will be gone. As soon as darkness fell, we carried it to the roof. The old thief would have had small reward, even if he had got into the *umbar*.

“Now you sleep here on the verandah the rest of the night. I shall go up on the roof.”

The sight of a police squad climbing the hill next morning brought relief to the entire household.

“As soon as the Chief gets this opium into the warehouse, we shall not be troubled with smugglers again,” Mustapha Khan told his wife and mother, “and you will be safe while I am in the city during the day.”

"*Salaam!*" the officer in charge of the squad greeted the Khan. "There is *tariaḳ* here; we have come for it. Where is it? Bring it forth."

"I carried it to the roof last night. You can use that ladder," Mustapha pointed to a rickety contrivance made of crooked poplar branches. Two men nimbly climbed to the roof, while the officer and other two stayed with Mustapha Khan.

"Shokat," the master called to the *ḳulfat*, "bring tea."

The tea was brought in and handed around to the five men, the Khan himself serving them.

"You are taking great trouble," murmured the officer.

"It is proper to stand up and administer to him whom thou has seated on thy carpet, or made thy guest," the host reminded him politely. "You walked a long way this morning and you need refreshment."

"By my eyes! It was a long walk, and you shall enjoy it, too," the officer said as he stood up. "You will walk ahead."

"But I do not go down to the city for another hour. The Head of the Department of Finance does not expect me so soon."

"The Chief of Finance, perhaps not. But it is the Chief of Police who expects you this morning. I have an order for your arrest."

"My arrest! What do you mean?"

One of the underlings spoke up.

"Oh, sir, you can't smuggle *tariak*, even if you are an important official. You are sure to be found out. It is *kismet*."

"You are mistaken," Mustapha Khan replied coldly. "This *tariak* I found here when I came up to the garden yesterday. I have already communicated with the Internal Revenue Office. They are coming for it this morning."

"It makes a pretty story," the officer politely assented, "but you will come with us—now!"

All oratory and threats of legal retribution were without avail. The officer had been commanded to hand over Mustapha Khan to the Chief of Police and he intended to do so.

From indoors, pressed as close as she dared to the open window, Farrukh had watched all that went on with terror and dismay. She could not hear all that was said, but the few words she did catch were enough to set her heart racing. What mistake was this—surely these men were wrong, and her husband could clear the matter up in a few moments. But they weren't even listening to him. She saw his face, grim and set, as he came to bid her a swift good-bye. There was no time for words, even.

"It's all right, Farrukh. Don't worry yourself. I'll be back soon. Once I see the Chief all will be settled."

If only it would! With anxious eyes she watched him turn and stride away.

The young Khan walked before the policemen in bitterness of heart. "Who is plotting against me?" he pondered the question without solution. "What was my Chief's message? As soon as he learns of this deed, he will make it right. I need not worry about that, but I must discover who my enemies are."

The Chief of Police received Mustapha Khan with visible embarrassment.

"This is a serious offense, Mustapha Khan, as you well know, and the evidence is very plainly against you. You had established a fair name with the governor and the Department of Finance. Was that only a shield? Thy virtues thou hast exposed in the palm of thy hand; thy vices thou hast hid under thy armpit. Is it not so?"

"It is not." The young man was emphatic in his denial. "The Head of the Department of Finance will tell you that I informed him of this opium cache yesterday. He will clear me and procure my release."

"The Head of the Department of Finance," the Chief of Police said slowly, "has already agreed that we should prosecute the case. He remarked that he was always glad to see smugglers brought to justice."

In contrast to their speedy apprehension of the Khan, the Police Department now procrastinated with little or no excuse and did not bring their culprit to trial for more than a week. Even the Internal Revenue officials became disgusted with their laziness and finally went to the Chief of Police personally and insisted that the

trial be delayed no longer. And to Farrukh that one week was a year of torture, with the accusing eyes of Mas'udeh on her whenever she looked up.

Mustapha Khan was judged by the court to be sufficiently versed in the law to defend himself without the aid of an attorney. Notwithstanding the force that innocence gives to an appeal, the young assistant in the Revenue Office could not convince the court that he was not guilty of collecting opium from a smuggling ring. The Chief of Finance, who would have been his best witness, failed to appear in spite of the interest, both personal and professional, which he should have had in the case.

The trial was a farce throughout. After reading the charge, the police chief brought out his witnesses: the police officer who with his squad had found the saddlebags full of unstamped opium in the culprit's garden; a woman who had informed the police in a hoarse voice of seeing the Khan carry suspicious loads toward the hills every night during the opium harvest; a thickset, heavily bearded man with thick-lens spectacles who testified to observing from the adjoining garden that a rendezvous had taken place in the Khan's summer garden several nights during the opium harvest and that on two occasions the men drove laden donkeys when they departed.

To these charges Mustapha Khan denied all knowledge except that opium had been found on his prop-

erty. But no one appeared to corroborate his statement that he had given notice to the Internal Revenue Office previous to its confiscation.

Reluctantly the Chief of Police announced that he found the defendant guilty of being an accomplice in opium smuggling.

"It is superfluous for me to tell you the penalty for this offense, Mustapha Khan," the Chief gravely continued. "Your own connection with the Department of Finance and the office of Internal Revenue particularly has made you aware of the punishment for such offenses. For one who has used an honorable public office as a cloak to hide his nefarious traffic, the crime is the greater. If public servants are required by the civil service law to give up eating or smoking opium, how much worse should trafficking in the drug be regarded!

"For this offense you are fined fifty *tomans* and removed from the position of Assistant in the Internal Revenue Office of the Department of Finance."

Anger blazed in the eyes of Mustapha Khan. The injustice of it! The Chief of Police seemed eager to get at the true facts in the case; yet he had not doubted the veracity of the witnesses, whose appearance was far from trustworthy. The defendant studied the scene intently, photographing in his mind every face in the room—the presiding officer, the police squad and other witnesses, even the casual spectators who had squatted on the floor and idly listened to the trial of the rich young Khan.

“Among this group are some who are my enemies, some who have plotted against me. I shall remember their faces and some day uncover their work.” He returned the brazen stare of the hoarse-voiced woman, the evil squint of the thickset neighbor who had undoubtedly only rented a summer garden, the curious glances of the spectators. Then he turned and left the courtroom. Fortunately, he had merely to send a note to the wheat merchant with whom he had credit and then wait for his release only until the court accepted the credit memorandum.

A few personal belongings—law books, pens, a water pipe—were scattered about his room in the revenue office. He was collecting them into a pile when the Chief stepped into the room.

“Peace be with you!” he greeted the young man.

“With you be peace!” Mustapha replied mechanically.

“And were you preparing to leave without so much as a word of farewell?”

“You knew I had been removed from office. You knew I was innocent and yet you did not come to testify for me. I restored smuggled opium to your office. And this is my reward! Can I hold kind feelings toward you after this?”

“The sky enriches the earth with rain, and the earth gives it dust in return. As the Arabs say: ‘What the vessels have, they give.’ If my moral character strike

thee as improper, do not renounce thine own good character."

"But why did you fail me? Why did you not come to my aid?"

"Perhaps I did. Perhaps my absence was a greater aid to you than my presence would have been," the Chief gravely rebuked the young man. "Perhaps your eyes and ears discovered much that would not have been disclosed had I been in the courtroom. Did you not see your accusers? Had I been there to testify for you, the case might have been dropped altogether."

"Yes, my accusers I saw and they succeeded in having me removed from office. But what does it profit me to know their faces and even their voices—their names were doubtless assumed—if I am powerless to avenge myself?"

The Chief sat on the corner of the hand-made walnut table where his assistant had penned so many documents.

"It will profit you just this much, Mustapha Khan. These smugglers will continue to trouble us until we catch them. If we do not catch them, they may send a big shipment out of the country and then you and I will both be removed from office for negligence. My staying away from the trial today was your opportunity to identify as many of those conspirators as possible. They would not have dared to show themselves if I had been there, but they had no fear of you.

"Now tell me all that you learned."



XVI

THE SEEDS OF IDLENESS

"So you see," Mustapha finished, "I am not disgraced, after all, but merely promoted to another job."

"So it was a trick," said Farrukh.

It was the first moment since her husband's arrest and subsequent release that they had had the chance of a private talk together. Sitting now under the apricot tree in the garden, they spoke in lowered tones.

"Not altogether," Mustapha said. "The information was laid against me, all right; they had only to let the arrest and trial take its course. The Chief knew all along

it was just another plot to get me out of the way, but if he had told me about it I might have acted differently in the courtroom and betrayed myself, and he dared not risk that. The thing was to let them believe they had succeeded, and that now, deposed from office, I can be of no further danger to them.

“That was why he could not let even you know, in case by some accident the truth came out. He explained it all to me. And now I am to leave at once, on a special mission as investigator. But of this nothing will be announced. You, Farrukh, will stay here with my mother. Mahmud has his instructions, and I shall write to you. Who knows but that in this interval, with me, as they think, disgraced and safely out of the way, a good many strange things may come to light!”

With Mustapha Khan away the days passed tranquilly and uneventfully in the large summer house on the hills; a relief to Farrukh after the anxiety and suspense of the past two weeks. She spent her time in the garden, sewing or embroidering to add to the steadily-growing pile of baby clothes tucked away in the painted chest.

And as she sewed, there, not far distant, was the diligent Abbas. No gardener in all Iran, not even those who cared for the royal gardens in Teheran, spent more time and effort on his plot of ground than did Abbas on the five or six acres of Mustapha Khan's summer garden. Although he had been instructed to come only

three days a week with food from the bazaar and tend the alfalfa on those days, Abbas displayed an abnormal zeal for gardening and appeared every morning. True, the alfalfa grew surprisingly fast and required frequent attention, and Abbas did make himself useful mending the broken patches in the stone wall. But Farrukh, though she knew her husband's reason for employing him, disliked the man and chafed under his unhindered surveillance.

One day she said to him, "Abbas, the master expects you to come only on alternate days. You are not to come every day. He will pay for only three days a week."

"That doesn't matter," Abbas had replied good-naturedly. "It is so much cooler here than in the city, I'd rather come up here and work every day, even though I do not receive pay for all my work." And no amount of argument could induce him to abide by the three-day arrangement.

Sometimes, though rarely, visitors came to break the monotony of the daily round. One morning there arrived Maluk Khanoum, who had been Farrukh's neighbor in the city.

Warm and breathless from the last steep climb up the path, she greeted her hostesses ceremonially and then settled herself with a sigh of relief on the rug, letting her long black veil fall on the floor beside her.

Shokat shuffled into the room on numerous errands

with the steaming samovar, a tray of tiny glasses in carved metal holders, a tray of cucumbers and another of apricots, elaborate silver dishes containing candied quince jelly, parched peas, watermelon seeds and squash seeds.

"Ah, these idle-time seeds!" the visitor remarked with hearty appreciation, after the second glass of tea had been consumed in ceremonious silence. "How sweet and crisp they are! Do you prepare them yourself or do you find them in the bazaar?" She placed a watermelon seed vertically between her front teeth, cracked the hard black outer shell, and extracted the sweet kernel.

"I prepare my own busywork," Farrukh primly replied, pleased by the woman's audible enjoyment. "I suppose I prepare them just as you do. I select seeds from the ripest melons, soak them in brine, and then roast them in the oven."

"Yes, yes!" the guest nodded vigorously. "But somehow they taste different."

"The melons were from Tuhistan," the *kulfat* muttered under her breath as she stood behind the door, out of sight but within earshot.

Mas'udeh critically peeled a cucumber lengthwise and nibbled at one end. "And so you, too, live in the Street of The Mulberry Trees?" she inquired of their guest.

"Yes, in the garden adjoining your son's garden. And last night at sunset, as I looked toward your son's

home, I said to myself, I would make a picnic to the *Darreh* on the morrow and see how your health has been. I always go out of the city on the Tenth of Saffar. Less harm is apt to befall one in the country on such an unlucky day. So this morning my sons brought me part way up the ravine. I ate my bread and cheese in yonder orchard and told my sons to meet me there at sunset."

The prospect of a four-hour visit delighted both Farrukh and her mother-in-law. Maluk Khanoum brought all the news of the Street and some of the bazaar gossip as well. Did they know that there had been a wedding in one of the gardens down the street? Maluk Khanoum had stood on the roof of her house to watch and had seen nine boys march into the garden with paper-trimmed trays of sweetmeats balanced on their heads. They must have served *arrak*, for some of the men conducted themselves disgracefully.

And did they know that Shamse Khanoum had had twins, but that they died? And it was a pity, too, for they were both boys.

"Oh!" cried Farrukh in startled anguish. "Did she use no charms? Could she not have had the *mullah* write a prayer which would save them? Suppose . . . suppose something happened to my baby. . . ."

"Hush, Farrukh!" Mas'udeh Khanoum spoke not unkindly. "You are a strong, healthy girl. Your little one will be all right."

"Yes, yes!" the visitor sought to amend her blunder. "With you it will be different. Shamse Khanoum had had many children, fourteen of them, and was tired of living. She did not give her babes the will to live. But you are eager to have your child, are you not? With you all will be well—may God so will it!

"But let me tell you more of the city news."

Like the song of the canary when its warbling is interspersed with noisy pecking at birdseed in the cage, their light chatter continued to the accompaniment of snapping and cracking squash and melon seeds. The seeds of idleness provided a desirable amount of busy-work for a lazy afternoon.

Promptly at sunset the guest requested permission to depart. The farewell glass of tea was served and Maluk Khanoum gathered up her robe and pulled the veil across her face.

"Now that this evil day is past, I shall not fear to return to the city," she said. "Ill luck might have befallen me in the city. Is it not so, Mas'udeh Khanoum?"

"You speak truly," the elder woman agreed.

"God protect you! May God's protection go with you!" they said to each other in the doorway, and the guest went down the hillside to meet her sons, who also had been spending the day in the country.

Soon after Maluk Khanoum had bidden her hostess good-bye, Mahmud presented himself in the garden with a letter for Farrukh. He had waded ankle-deep

in the dust and was hot and tired, but his salaam was as polished and deliberate as that of a courtier.

"How do you know it is from the master?" Farrukh asked quickly, as she took the thin square envelope sealed with heavy red wax.

"May I be your sacrifice, I asked the postman to read the seal. He said it was that of the Khan. So I set out with it at once."

Farrukh broke the seals and looked eagerly at the letter within. Mustapha's handwriting was somewhat different from the script of her reading book, and therefore more difficult for her to decipher. Yet only a moment sufficed to give her the glad news of the first sentence.

"Tomorrow at dawn I shall set out on my homeward journey, *insh'allah*, and I hope to be in Hamadan almost as soon as this letter."

He was on his way! He was nearing home. Tomorrow's sun would shine upon his return.

"How I long to behold you, my little Jasmine! And my mother, Mas'udeh Khanoum, what of her health? And Shokat? And Mahmud? And that old rascal, Abbas? I had thought to watch him and instead he has had a clear field to watch us."

Abbas! There he was, over yonder, most innocently weeding a flower bed. Thoughtfully, Farrukh folded the sheets of her letter, replacing them in the envelope for a later more leisurely reading. But she did not at

once return to the house. Back and forth, back and forth she paced, her brows knit in earnest thought. "I had thought to watch him," Mustapha Khan had said. But he was not here to watch, and she, Farrukh, was. Only that morning, Abbas had inquired of the master and his probable return.

Farrukh stopped in her pacing. Ah! *That* was it. But what would Mustapha Khan say to this plan that now flashed into her mind? Would he approve? Or would his anger rise against her that she had presumed beyond her place? In swift decision, she threw back her head.

"Mahmud!" she called. Then, as the servant stood before her, she continued quietly, "I would have you accompany Abbas when he returns to the city tonight. Let him make conversation with you, whereupon do you say to him that you brought a letter from Mustapha Khan today and that the master will return in three days. Tell him you go to the Street of The Mulberry Trees to fetch papers desired by the master.

"Go with Abbas as far as his gate—it is on your way. Then bid him good-bye and pass on. But when he has gone within, loiter nearby, in a recessed doorway. Abbas will come out again, but it will be dark when he does so, of that I am certain. And if you take care, he will not see you. Follow him cautiously and discover where he goes. Whatever gate he enters, stay without until he leaves or until someone else comes out. Discover all

that you possibly can about the place and who is in it.

“Listen, Mahmud. Listen to each of my words. Do you recall that night the prowlers came, the first night we were here? You may see some of those men tonight. But if you are cautious, you will be in no danger. And if you are alert, you may bring back word which will please the master mightily and cause him to reward you well.

“So mark well what I have said, and return to me in the morning. Return early, before Abbas arrives, to give me an account of what has transpired. That Abbas will be about tonight, I am certain, and for this reason, Mahmud. As soon as you tell him the master is on his way back, he will try to communicate with his band. Do you understand?”

“I am the sacrifice. It shall be done as you command,” the servant assured her.

Supper was no more than a gulp of *dugh*—diluted clabber—and a nibble of bread. Then for an hour or more, Farrukh puzzled over the remaining pages of her husband’s letter. Though his handwriting was so beautiful it looked like a picture to her, Farrukh found the reading of it more difficult by far than the *mirza’s* lessons. But despite its difficulty, the girl persevered in her labor of love and the finger that thoughtfully traced a puzzling word laid on each dot and curve a light caress.

The letter told of Mustapha’s mission, of his new

hopes that the mystery of the smuggling might shortly be solved, and of his trip. And last of all:

“As soon as I return, I must spend a day at least in the city making my report to the Tax Collector. Then, if he gives me leave, I shall take three or four days to go to Tuhistan and collect rents—and I shall want you to accompany me. After that, it is probable that I shall be sent to Ispahan. How would you like to make that journey, too?”

“Now, little Jasmine! Adorn yourself prettily, for another day will bring the return of Mustapha.”

In the swift joyousness of the thought was reflected, “Tuhistan! He is going to take me home for a visit!” All her constant longing for the sight again of her mother’s face, all her homesickness for her father and her brothers and the old, familiar sights of the little village. Home! She was going home!

Then, just as swiftly, remembrance of her husband’s suspicion of her father stabbed the joyousness. Deep within Mustapha’s mind, belief in Abdullah’s guilt still lingered. He would demand proof of innocence, and if none was brought forward—what was it the Khan had said? “I will turn him out to tend sheep.” Oh, my father, my dear, dear father. . . .



XVII

SHADOWING THE SHADOWER

While accompanying Abbas to his house, Mahmud informed him that his master was to return in three days. Then he bade him good-bye and went along toward the Street of The Mulberry Trees. He turned a corner and waited in a recessed opening for Abbas to pass so that he could follow.

Mahmud found no great difficulty in keeping at a discreet distance from Abbas. It was not this that worried him. What he feared was the danger of evil spirits. *Jinns* were always abroad at night. They had attacked

him once before and might follow him again. Or, he might step on one in the dark and have a tribe of them seeking vengeance on him. But what could he do? To disobey the *khanoum's* order would mean the bastinado when the master returned. And no *jinn* could inflict more pain than the cruel beating of the bastinado.

"I am the sacrifice," Mahmud grumbled under his breath. "The bastinado or the *jinnns*—one of them will get me."

Many a stretch of the way was in darkness, for a jutting house wall often turned the course of the street and shut out the feeble rays of the infrequent street lights. Abbas carried no lantern, but he knew the way so well he might have walked with equal certainty in total darkness.

As if thrust into the open street by unfriendly garden walls stood The Camel Tower close to the outskirts of the city and only a stone's throw from the Musallah hill. Thirteen centuries before it had been a stately tower where camels were sacrificed in religious ceremony. To this day the blackened interior of the sacrificial tower recalls stories of those rites, and the name clings to the structure though the people have long since abandoned the practice.

Before the door of this ancient structure Abbas paused to look up and down the passageway. Seeing no one, he picked up a stone and tossed it lightly against the grill-work of the window.

Hugging the shadows against a nearby wall, Mahmud waited breathlessly. A hoarse voice at the window brought a cautious answer from Abbas, the door opened a mere crack, and he slipped inside.

For several minutes Mahmud held himself taut against the wall. Then he relaxed and by degrees settled down until he was squatting comfortably on the cobblestones. For what seemed an interminably long time he sat there. He had just begun to think that Abbas had gone in for the night, when he was aroused by the creaking of the door. In a flash he was on his feet, flattened against the shadows again, scarcely daring to breathe. A thickset figure emerged from the doorway and hurried away.

Should he follow the man or should he wait here in the shadows? Farrukh Khanoum had said to wait until someone came out. But she had also said to discover all he could about the place. He would remain. If he could only scale the wall—it was ridiculously low—he might lie on its broad top. He felt the surface. It was old and crumbling. With his pocketknife he chipped a toe hold here and there. Scarcely had he stretched himself along the top of the wall when he heard sounds far down the street. Unmistakably it was a string of donkeys clattering along the cobblestones. Praise be to Allah, there was no moon tonight! If anyone should find him here, what might not his punishment be for spying into another man's garden!

He tried to peer into the window of the tower, but the light was too faint to reveal anything. The occupant must be very poor indeed to use only a cotton wick in a saucer of castor oil, he thought.

The donkeys were coming nearer. Somewhere a dog barked. Mahmud wished with all his heart he was safe at home on his own rug. Around the bend they came, the thickset fellow and another man urging the animals rapidly along.

At the Camel Tower they stopped. Again a pebble struck the window, a few words passed, and the door opened. Abbas and still another stranger staggered out with arms heavily laden. Silently they filled the saddlebags, returning to the tower room again and again. Then there was a brief whispered conference and the group separated, two of the men returning to the heart of the city while Abbas and the bulky stranger quietly turned the donkeys in the direction of the outskirts.

These Mahmud decided to follow at a safe distance. Beyond the last garden the little caravan left the highway and cut across the wheat fields now swept bare by the gleaners. They avoided the bridge and forded the shallow stream some distance away. At that point Mahmud decided to return to the city. Hastening down the Street of The Mulberry Trees, he knocked at his own gate.

"The woman sleeps hard," he complained, as he banged the knocker for the fifth time.



Again a pebble struck the window.

Finally a sleepy voice called out, "Who is it?"

"Open! It is Mahmud."

His wife drew the bolt, grumbling as loudly as the squeaky door. "Why did you not wait a little longer and put the stars to bed?"

"Be still, woman! Did I not tell you the *khanoum* received a letter from the Khan today? There was a command in it for me. I was set to watch a house."

"The tea house, I daresay. And had they sold all the tea and *tariak* that you must come home so early?"

Mahmud yawned his contempt. "For that I will not tell you what I saw tonight. 'Thou may'st shut the door of Joy upon that dwelling where thou hearest resounding the scolding voice of a woman.' " And with that he went off to sleep.

The late vigil had been too much for him. When he reached the garden in the hills next day, the sun was already high in the cloudless sky. Even so, Abbas, the erstwhile zealous gardener, had not arrived. Farrukh listened attentively to Mahmud's story.

"Abbas probably will not return," she surmised. "Hereafter you will bring our food from the bazaar. Arrange your trips so that you will be in the city when the water flows into our garden. Keep it fresh, Mahmud, and keep the water fresh in the pool."

"Yes, lady," Mahmud promised. He did not tell her that his whole family had moved into the Room of The Cascades during her absence.

Nightfall had brought a refreshing coolness to the breeze when Mustapha Khan rode up the ravine and tethered his donkey under a tree.

His wife and mother greeted him joyfully. "Your coming is a blessing," they declared.

While he removed the red-brown dust of barren plateaus from his face and hands, Mas'udeh set the samovar to boiling. Then they listened to his story of the marvelous sights he had seen, and when the tea was ready, with the bread and cucumbers, Mas'udeh happily placed it all before him.

Mas'udeh soon left them, climbed to the roof, and unrolled her mattress for the night. Mustapha Khan and Farrukh, however, lingered over the last, long, green cucumber to confide to each other all the little intimate things that had happened during this, their first separation.

Farrukh related the story of their neighbor's twin babies and whispered her own fear to her husband.

"Take me with you down to the city, Mustapha, and let the *mullah* write a prayer for the baby and me. I will dip it in a glass of water and drink it."

"But, Farrukh, it is such an old-fashioned idea! You don't believe that will help, do you?"

"And how much do you know about babies, Mustapha Khan?"

"Come, come, Little Jasmine! Let us not disagree on this the first night of my return. Keep yourself well

and happy and we shall get the best midwife there is in the city. Of course, I want everything to go well with you and the baby . . . my little son."

Then he told her of his conference with the officials in Tabriz, the information they had given him which indicated that it was an international ring of smugglers with whom they had to deal, and not merely a local band.

"And could you read my letter?" her husband then asked. "I penned it very carefully and chose simple words so that it would be easy to read."

"Yes," Farrukh smiled in recollection. "Some of the words gave me much trouble, but I understood most of them."

The stars high above them were bright and beautiful. The night, in its stillness, brought fragrance of flowers.

"It is peace," said Mustapha, "peace of the heart."

Beside him, Farrukh drew a deep breath. Would the peace linger when he knew what she had done? But he must know, and at once.

"Beloved," she said gently, "news of Abbas awaits you, and may you find it in your heart to forgive me, if I have done aught that is displeasing to you."

"Speak, my little Jasmine," said Mustapha.

"When Mahmud brought the letter, it was late afternoon and Abbas was ready to return to the city. He was here in the garden, just as he has been each day since your departure. And all at once, the thought came to

my mind that were he to hear of your coming, he would go straight to his companions. Was it not an opportunity to watch him and discover who they were, I asked myself? For so it seemed to me.

“Calling Mahmud to me, I commanded him to walk back with Abbas, confiding in him as they went along that the master would be here in three days. Whereupon, Mahmud was to bid farewell to Abbas at his own gate, but was to linger nearby, to watch throughout the evening and to follow Abbas should he go forth, as I felt certain he would do.

“It all fell out as I had foreseen. Abbas came forth after darkness and Mahmud, following him, discovered that the band has a meeting place in the old Camel Tower.”

Mustapha Khan sat so quietly, as Farrukh continued her account of Mahmud’s adventurings, so quietly and so still that Farrukh faltered at the last.

“Forgive me, my lord,” she pleaded. “Oh, forgive if what I did was not as you would have wished.”

At her words, Mustapha Khan drew her close. “Forgive! There is nothing to forgive. You have done that which shall be told to the Head of the Department of Finance. And—who knows—you may have accomplished more here in our garden than even your husband contrived on all his journeyings!”

For a few brief moments, it seemed to Farrukh she was happier than she had ever been before. Then once

more, through the joyousness, sad memory of her father struck with its pain. But she could not speak. That must be as the Khan willed.

Mustapha Khan's recital next day of his conference with the Tabrizis won many a nod of approval from the Head of the Department of Finance. But it was the story of the Camel Tower that galvanized him into action.

"At last we will act! Call a *droshky*," he shouted.

And soon he and his young Special Investigator were jolting over the streets toward the Camel Tower. Before the last bend in the street, they left the carriage and proceeded on foot.

At the door of the tower they stopped, tossed a pebble against the grillwork, and waited. The door opened ever so little and a hoarse voice greeted them.

"The same voice!" Mustapha Khan thought in startled recognition, and quickly thrust his foot into the opening before the door could be slammed shut. Pushing the door open, Mustapha and his Chief walked into the dim interior.

"It is but a poor place for fine lords like you." The woman who had spoken to them waved her hand about the room at the blackened walls, the tiny windows, the rubbish on the broken floor, the pallet of straw against the wall. "It is a poor, dismal place, but it seems to belong to no one; so I pay no rent. So far the police have not molested me."

"So? Then you are a friend of the police? Is that a boast or a promise? Or perhaps someone pays to have you undisturbed?"

With a sudden movement the young man caught the woman's wrists and held her firmly.

"In that rubbish," he spoke over his shoulder as he struggled with his prisoner, "you might find something valuable."

The official lifted several bits of paper from the filth.

"It is nothing," the woman laughed in their faces, "only the paper that was around some stockings I bought in the bazaar." She was unable to read and had not recognized the necessity for destroying the bits of paper which lay scattered on the floor, but she now became uneasy as she saw the visitors' evident interest.

"People like you carry their purchases in a cotton handkerchief," the Chief reminded her. "White paper is supplied only for customers of our class, or for the *feranghis*." He continued to poke about the room, but every trace of opium had been removed. Peering through a hole broken in the floor, he saw a dark underground chamber, which seemed to contain only bones and filth. The hole in the floor was small; it was improbable that anything of value had ever been let down through it into the chamber.

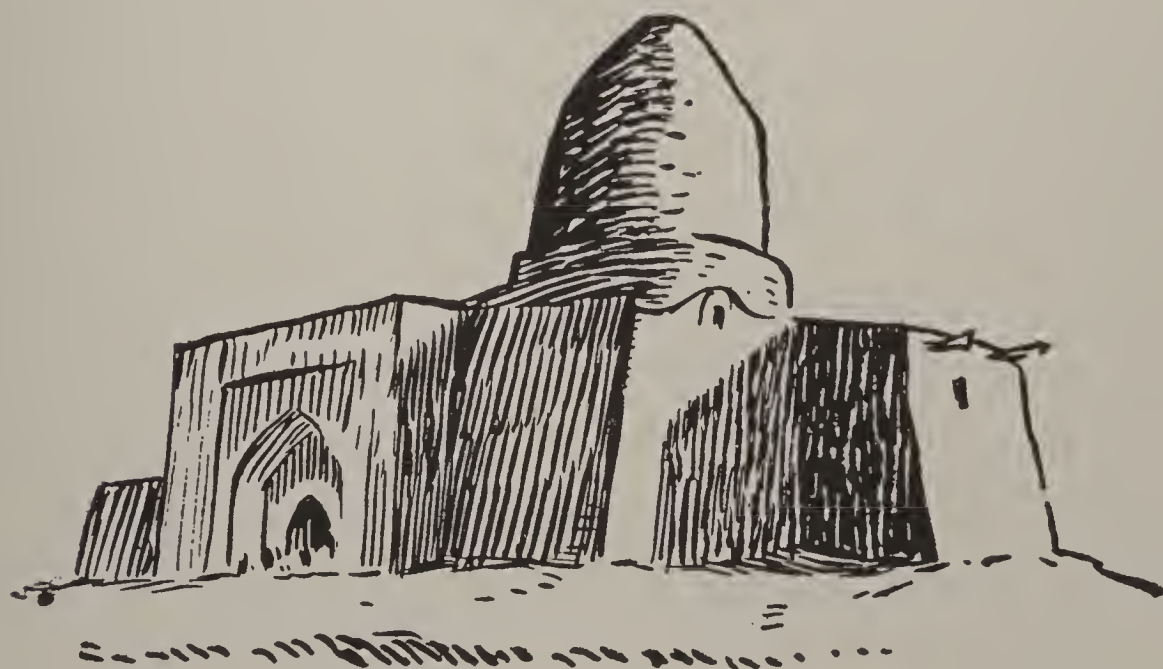
Jolting back to the office, the two men pieced the paper together on their knees. It proved to be a roughly sketched map of caravan trails which avoided the cities

and main highways all the way to the Gulf. Turning the paper over and fitting it together again, they read a list of names of persons in Ispahan, in Busrah, and in Bushire.

“The names they doubtless memorized; the map they must have copied on another paper,” the Chief mused. “The map from which this was copied must have been very large indeed to have had so many *charvadar* trails marked. There is only one place where such a map is to be found and the person who has best access to it . . .”

“Would be . . .?”

“The Colonel, who was instrumental in bringing about your first arrest. My responsibility now will be to prove the authorship of this map and list of names. With this new development, I think you should take not more than two days to go to your village and then be ready on the third day to set out for Ispahan.”





XVIII

THE TRUTH COMES OUT

Much to Farrukh's disappointment, Mustapha decided not to take her with him to Tuhistan, after all. It must now be a very hurried visit, he said, and on further consideration he felt that the long hot ride there and back across the mountains in the height of summer would be too tiring for her. And Farrukh reluctantly agreed with him, though she longed as much as ever to see her family once more, especially since she knew that the heavy snows later on would prevent her mother's

crossing the mountain pass to be with her at the time her baby was expected.

"It shall be as you say," she said. Nor did she give any slightest sign of the anxiety still in her heart for her father.

The days of Mustapha Khan's absence in her home village dragged on leaden feet for the girl. What was happening there? Was her husband sentencing her beloved father to a future of tending sheep?

Eager as she was for Mustapha's return, she went to greet him with a quickened concern that would not be hidden. And Mustapha, especially sensitive in discerning his young wife's feelings these days, saw it at once.

"The best of news for you, my Jasmine!" he cried. "Abdullah's innocence has been completely proven. Listen! It is the story which was awaiting me there, and which your father himself and I pieced together. Had I known it was in store for us, I would have gone to Tuhistan long since. Some way or other, I would most certainly have managed the trip."

It was a curious tale, this that had awaited him. And as she listened to it, Farrukh's heart grew light and she became happier than she had been for a single moment since the first unjust arrest. Arriving at her old home in Tuhistan, Mustapha told her, he had missed the servant Rajab, whose place was now taken by a stranger. Inquiring, Mustapha had learned from Abdullah that there had been a mystery about Rajab. It seemed that

the servant had suddenly begun spending money very freely, money which could not possibly have come from the produce of his little melon patch.

Too, he had begun loitering long hours at the village tea house, buying lavishly of opium, making extravagant purchases of *arrak* and new clothes for his wife. Though Abdullah could not detect him in stealing, he had nevertheless felt that something was radically wrong. For where was all that money coming from? So when Rajab had taken to reckless opium smoking, the headman had made this an excuse to be rid of him.

"All this," Mustapha said, "took place about a month after my last visit, when I found the vase, you will recall. Rajab's brother had been there that very day of our visit—yours and mine—don't you remember how we had ice for our *sherbat* because he had brought it and made a present of it? Well, I clearly remembered how, after we had examined the vase and shaken the coins from it, Rajab came into the room; then returned on some excuse, acting very strangely indeed. The strangeness of his actions struck me at the time, yet no suspicion entered my mind. Why should it, after all? We had hidden the vase, first returning to it all the coins, or at least, so we had thought.

"This is what happened, we are sure. One of those coins must have rolled off into a corner of the room, unnoticed by us. Rajab must have seen it and have picked it up, keeping it for himself. He didn't dare change it

in the village, so he gave it to his brother, the visiting ice carrier, to change it for him here in the city. This the brother did.

“How do I know? Through your quickness of mind, my Jasmine! You were the one who ferreted out the necessary link in the proof. The brother changed the coin into silver and bought the donkey harness, which you noticed, with his share of the transaction. Then he returned the rest to Rajab, who promptly began to spend it like water. Abdullah and I checked on dates, and it all fits together perfectly. I have no doubt that it all happened as we worked it out. And by ill luck, that same coin in the bazaar was what set the Colonel on my track.”

Farrukh's eyes glowed with the depth of her happiness.

“Nor had I said a word to your father of my unjust suspicion, I am happy to say,” Mustapha continued. “He is all that you have said and more, an upright and an honest, just man.”

In her relief, the girl burst into tears.

“Now, my little Jasmine! Lift up your heart. The journey to Ispahan is ahead, and of that you may be confident for we shall ride thither in a motor car. We shall see—yes, Half of the World, my flower. And when we return, who knows what important word we shall hear?”

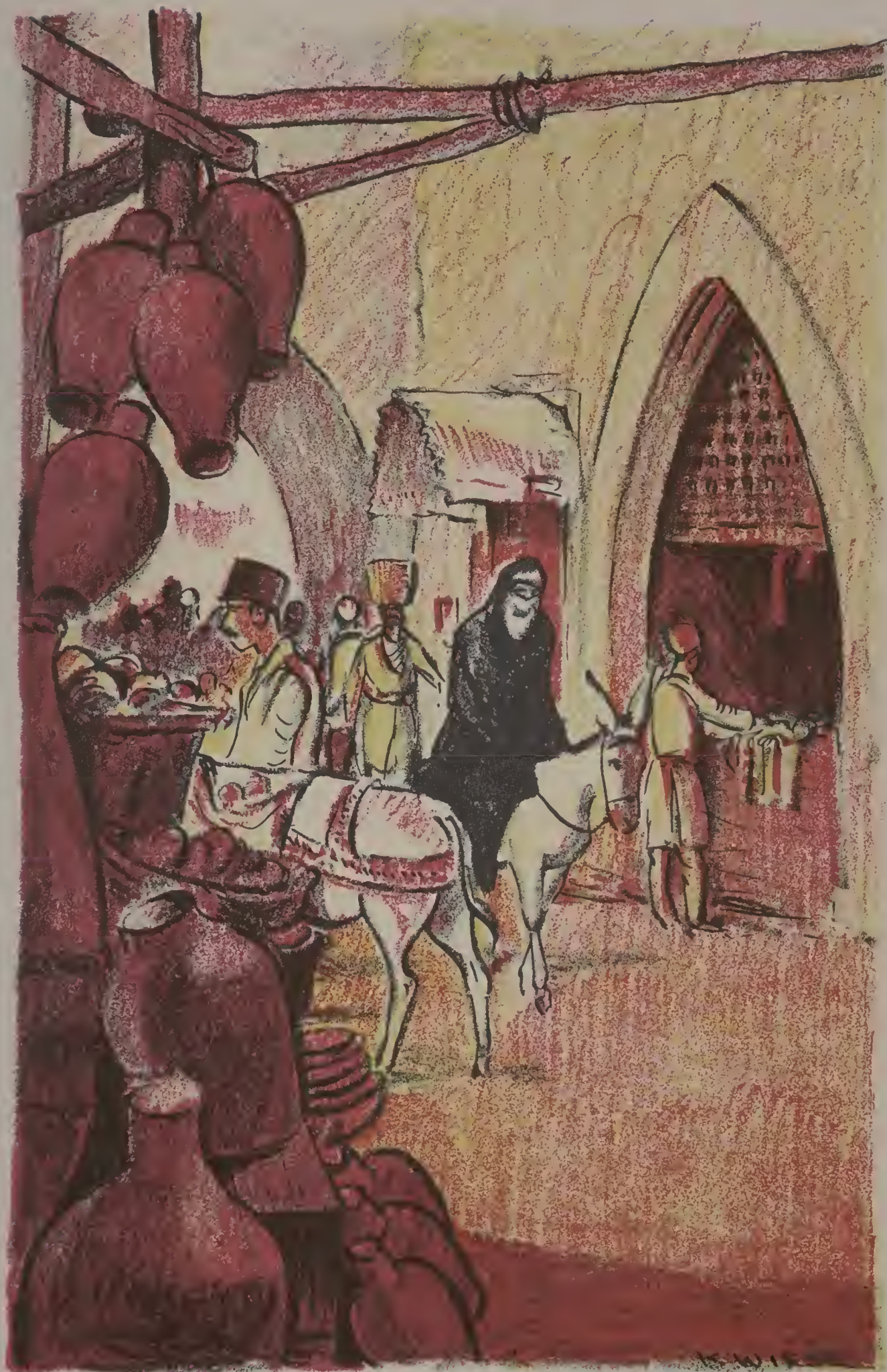
Of them all, only old Shokat was sad over the de-

parture. Ispahan, two days' journey away by machine, might be at the end of the earth. Only when Farrukh promised to bring her a lucky charm which would keep off the Evil Eye did she subside to half-smothered sobs and reconcile herself to the faultfinding society of Mas'udeh Khanoum.

Riding down to the city on her white donkey, Farrukh went directly to the Street of The Mulberry Trees, there to pack two saddlebags and a big embroidered *dastmal*, a handkerchief, with such clothing and other accessories as they should need on the journey. Mustapha Khan in the meantime went to the Garage Ec-batana and arranged for two seats in a touring car bound for Ispahan. Then he visited the police department to secure a permit to travel to Ispahan via Daulatabad, Sultanabad, and Dilijan. This *jevaz* bore only his name. Farrukh was not worthy of consideration; she was only a woman.

After a quick trip to the Department of Finance for final instructions, retarded somewhat by a *bon voyage* glass of tea, Mustapha Khan brought a *droshky* to his garden to carry his wife speedily to the garage where the chauffeur awaited them. Among their luggage were two jugs of water. This porous pottery promoted rapid evaporation and insured a cool water supply on the road.

The car set off only an hour after the scheduled start. At the Shevarin Gate they were halted by a police-soldier, who demanded to see their travel permits as well



Farrukh went directly to the Street of the Mulberry Trees

as the chauffeur's tax receipt and certificate of brake inspection. In a day of compulsory military training it was necessary to keep close surveillance over all men traveling from one city to another. Too easily might a young man of means move about from town to town, always one jump ahead of the enrollment officer. The inspector examined each permit and scrawled his signature on the back. Then he made a notation in his book: two elderly men making a pilgrimage to Qom, a young man on official business to Ispahan, and one *khanoum*.

"The *khanoum*?" he looked at the men inquiringly.

"She is my weakness," Mustapha Khan explained, and the party proceeded out of the city along a road shaded for a short distance by scraggly mulberry and willow trees, which had been frequently cropped for firewood. Beyond these lay carefully tended vineyards and then far away stretched the dusty haze of limitless *sahra*, the desert.





XIX HALF OF THE WORLD

Riding in a motor car was such a novel experience for Farrukh, who had been accustomed to nothing more than a donkey or a carriage, that it was with difficulty she kept silent before the strange men in the car. But she resolutely held to her mode of behaviour, and whenever her husband pointed out something of interest, she answered in a low, modest voice.

"This is a Shah Abbas bridge," Mustapha Khan explained, as they forded a small stream. "It was blown

up during the World War when the Turks and Russians were fighting here, and is just now being repaired. The high central arch and smaller pointed arch on each side make a graceful design. It must have been well built to withstand three hundred years of use."

At Zemanabad they stopped by a clump of willows, where an irrigation stream flowed across the stony road. Here a little blind boy brought them a tin of water for the car, and after they had given him a coin, they watched him tap, tap, tap with his stick to the tea house a little distance away.

It was noon when they reached Jo-Kar, the village of The Barley Workers. Tea, of course, they had and hot *kibobs*, bits of mutton broiled on skewers, folded with fresh, green onions in a thin sheet of brown bread.

One of the pilgrims recalled that he had a friend living in the village a *farsagh* off the highway, and he hired a *droshky* and jogged toward the barren, brown hills in the distance. Two hours later he returned, the chauffeur leisurely knocked the ashes from his pipe, the passengers took their places in the car—glad of the noonday rest—and once more they set out on the hot, dusty road.

In Daulatabad they again showed their travel permits to the police-soldier and continued the following day toward Sultanabad. For many miles the road climbed higher and higher. Now and then they crossed a small plain at the edge of which was a watch tower built on an outstanding hill. These isolated, round structures

were reminiscent of the days when village lords maintained watches for distant enemies. Occasionally, a guard now was to be seen stationed in one of these towers, but it was rare indeed that a traveler needed his protection.

Scattered at regular intervals along the route were tiny, brick posthouses, fallen into disuse or converted into tea houses. Previous to the World War the Russians had had a contract to carry the Persian post and their engineers had built the postroads and posthouses in this locality.

Adjoining the garage in Sultanabad was a caravanserai, where the passengers spent the night. Here the pilgrims transferred to another car bound for the sacred city of Qom, and other passengers took their places in the southbound car.

At noon the following day they reached Dilijan, which lay hot and breathless on the white clay plain. The dazzling sunshine nearly blinded Farrukh and she was glad for the shelter of a covered balcony at the roadside tea house where they had their lunch.

From the balcony she tossed the remains of a melon into the thick, white dust of the village street. Two beggars, who saw the food strike the ground, gave up their everlasting flea hunt for the more exciting struggle for food. Simultaneously they dived into the filth, snatched at the melon rind, tore it in half, and retired against the wall to enjoy the prize.

A village of white houses glistened in the vibrating haze of the desert a few miles from Dilijan.

“What is it?” asked one of the passengers in awe. “Is it the abode of the *jinns*?”

“No, the *jinns* do not live there,” the chauffeur informed them. “It is just an ordinary village. The clay in that village is very white. So the mud bricks also are white. And that makes their houses look so ghostly.”

All afternoon their route lay over the hard clay desert. Mirages glimmered in the distance wherever they looked. The jugs of cool water, which they had carried so many miles were now appreciated. Occasional clumps of thistle bearing fragrant purple pompons, cactus, and camel thorn were the only signs of vegetation. The delicate pink bloom that had beautified the desert in early spring was long since gone and only the dusty, gray-green leaves remained. Sometimes even this was lacking and the plain looked like one vast, barren threshing floor. In those places, the chauffeur found it smoother to drive at the side of the road than in the actual track itself.

A veritable oasis in the desert was Mehmi, the little village they came upon late in the afternoon. Many tiny irrigation streams crossed the road. On either side were melon patches and fields of alfalfa. Were they unnaturally green, or was it only the contrast to the dusty desert behind, which made Mehmi a cool, green paradise?

Entering the village by way of its one street, they were forced to stop for a string of donkeys which crowded in ahead. The *charvadar* halted his beasts while an opium inspector examined his load of wheat, thrusting a long, sharp steel needle into each saddlebag. This the inspector withdrew and smelled to detect the presence of opium.

On the last donkey sat a woman, a poor ragged creature with a deformed foot, holding a samovar in one arm and a fat bundle of a baby in the other. Farrukh pitied the woman as she watched her and wondered whether her husband ever ridiculed the misshapen foot.

"That beggar girl with the hare lip, the one in Tuhistan, said her husband used to beat her unmercifully," she recalled.

Now the inspector was examining their own luggage and giving them permission to continue on their way. At the far end of the town they saw newly constructed warehouses with marvelous tin roofs, built by the Russians, the villagers said, to store the various manufactures with which the bazaars were being flooded since the signing of the new economic treaty—linen and cotton cloth, soaps and perfume, lacquered wooden articles, baskets, and cones of sugar. There too they saw the new Russian establishment for manufacturing native cloth.

The low, rolling hills gradually flattened and disappeared. For nearly an hour before reaching Ispahan the travelers could see it spread out over a vast, green

plain—countless small, round pigeon towers with fancy rims; blue domes and shining minarets.

“How many mosques there must be in Ispahan!” Farrukh exclaimed at the sight.

Higher and grander than the others, one glorious blue dome like a giant, opalescent bubble told the location of the famous Royal Mosque.

They entered the city by way of the chief thoroughfare, the Avenue of The Four Gardens. A boulevard two hundred feet wide, it stretched for three-quarters of a mile in a straight line from a garden in the country to the heart of the city. Along either side and in a wide, double line down the center of the boulevard were rows of tall, ancient leafy *chinars*—sycamore or plane trees. The double row in the center provided space for park benches and refreshment stands. Everywhere were people promenading in the gardens.

“Shall we stop at a caravanserai tonight?” Farrukh asked, as she eagerly observed all the marvelous sights of this glorious city.

“Not tonight, nor for many nights,” her husband replied. “The chauffeur will take us to the governor’s garden. I have a letter for him from my friend, the governor of Hamadan, as well as one from my Chief. *Insh’allah*, we shall be invited to remain in his garden.”

Late though it was, he presented the letter of introduction to the governor and sat through a long, formal serving of tea, while Farrukh made the acquaintance of

the women. The upper room of the guest house was made ready and a savory meal prepared for the newcomers.

Luminous stars winked down upon the travelers as they climbed the ladder to their pallets on the roof—winked down and seemed to say, “Sleep well tonight. Tomorrow you shall see Half of The World.” And, indeed, the silhouette of palace walls, of towers and domes and minarets against the twinkling sky made magic the night and translated Farrukh and Mustapha far beyond Ispahan—the Half of The World—into another world of mystery and glamour, while the sleepy rustling of sycamore trees and the gurgling of water in pebbly garden channels sped the transition.

For one who was steeped in the literature and history of his country and longed to spend every minute of his sojourn in sightseeing, it was an ordeal for Mustapha Khan to pass by the stately palaces and mosques and spend the following day, instead, with the provincial Head of Finance, discussing the difficulties of their office and comparing clues in their common war against opium smugglers. Piece by piece they fitted together the Tabriz information, the Hamadan notes, the map and lists and identified handwriting from the Camel Tower, the Ispahan notes, until the clues fell into a clear pattern and revealed a startling fact.

“Here in Ispahan, right under my nose, is the seat of this gang!” ejaculated the local official. “Their chief is

stationed here, but is too clever to leave clues. That is what has always baffled us. We have traced petty outside workers to a garden in the city, made a few arrests that brought us no gain, and found ourselves facing a blank wall. The garden is that of a merchant, Mirza Roshan, who sells antiques in the bazaar, *ghalimkar* curtains, India shawls and such. We have searched his garden from one end to the other and found nothing. Yet we are certain he is connected with the ring."

"Who has the adjoining gardens?" Mustapha Khan inquired sharply.

"There again we are at a loss," the official replied. "On the one side is a very large garden maintained by a rich foreigner, a woman from Europe. She is the widow of a commercial agent who flourished here a few years ago. He died, but the woman stays on here. She spends her time with the foreign colony and is a quiet, respectable person."

"And on the other side?" Mustapha Khan pursued his questioning. "In the other garden—"

"—is *bandeh*, your slave! But shall I search myself?"

Mustapha Khan mused.

"And yet these workers go to the merchant's garden where, you are positive, there is no evidence of their activity? Perhaps I, who am unknown here, can discover the information we want. Shall we lay aside our work for the day? See! It is nearly sunset."

Without guide or servant, Mustapha Khan set out

next morning to visit the bazaars. Once more he cast a longing glance toward the Ali Kapi, that great palace from which a former Shah had watched polo games three centuries before; and turned to the only slightly less fascinating occupation of visiting the stalls of the brass seller, the silversmith, the Russian merchant, and all the other merchants and vendors who lined the passageways with their wares and confused the eye and ear with their eager efforts to sell.

In one section were the brass engravers. Here the visitor stopped before one of the tiny shops, where a man was fashioning a vase of the metal, shaping it on the lathe, turning and returning it to get a fair degree of symmetry. On its mate another artisan painstakingly engraved a delicate all-over pattern of birds and flowers. Beside him on the floor sat another engraver decorating a tray with pictures of kings in scenes of conquest, and spacing the border with medallions of Arabic inscription.

In the darkest corner of the shop stood a worker applying an oxidized finish to a candlestick, and a little boy energetically polishing a bowl on his blue shirt.

Nearby silversmiths displayed their engraved and beaten articles—thimbles and spoons and trays, cigarette boxes and vases and bowls. Here Mustapha bought a small flat dish of filigree for Farrukh, which would look well on her sweetmeat tray at home when she served tea to the governor's lady.

A narrow, circular stairway of steep brick steps now brought him to the second level, part of it enclosed into workshops and part of it open for those who preferred to work in the open sunshine. Here were the artists, who painted miniatures on bleached camel bone gathered from the adjacent desert and carefully sawed into desirable shapes and sizes, to be fashioned into small ornamental boxes, book covers, necklace pendants, or spoons.

Across the way was a small group of skilled workers who had developed the allied craft of producing "antique" Persian armor—weirdly decorated helmets, shields, mail, and battle-axes.

Mustapha Khan paused before one man, who appeared to be the master of the group, and pointed to a battle-axe which was aging rapidly. "Where do you find a market for this out-of-date weapon? And the helmets? No one wears helmets any longer."

The master laughed heartily.

"Don't you really know? The ignorant foreigners are my best customers. Every year I send a big shipment of 'antique' armor to New York and it sells like *angoush-pech* at New Year's!"

Mustapha Khan chuckled at the gullibility of foreigners and sauntered on, down the steep winding steps, back again in the dim passageways, searching for the sellers of *ghalimkars*. When he had finally identified the shop of Mirza Roshan, he addressed himself to the youth who squatted among the stacks of folded cottons.

The boy promptly spread open piece after piece of the creamy, handwoven cloth and displayed the graceful, intricate designs of blue and yellow, brown and maroon; the grotesque and disproportionate pictures of Persian kings and ladies, delicate floral designs and the famous palm leaf, and the ancient Tree of Life.

But the customer did not find a piece which pleased him. In despair the boy turned to his master, who had been sitting on the floor in the corner leisurely sipping a glass of tea and paying only indifferent attention to the affair.

“What is it?” Mirza Roshan politely inquired. “What kind of *ghalimkar* do you wish?”

To the smallest detail, Mustapha Khan described a very old prayer mat which belonged to his mother—the slender column on each side surmounted by a graceful, pointed arch; medallions of sacred writing from the Koran where the forehead and hands touched the mat; twining leaves and flowers, and rows of minute, pointed palm leaf motifs filling in the rest of the spaces.

“I know what you want,” the merchant replied thoughtfully. “I have such a *ghalimkar* in my home. It is very old; men do not do the careful work now that they did long ago.

“Have you seen them, a dozen of them sitting together with their work spread out on the floor, dipping their wood blocks in the dye and gossiping lightly all the time they apply the design to the cloth? Only now and then

do you find a man who strives for perfection. Even the workers who boil the cloth in the chemical solution seem not to be able to get results like their forefathers. The colors lack the richness of old-time work."

"But the Zendah Rud, our great river, master!" the lad spoke up to defend the quality of his master's merchandise. "The river washes the cloth as clean as ever. And the same sun sets the colors when the *ghalimkars* are spread on the flats to dry."

"Hush, lad!" the master spoke sharply, vexed that he had been deflected from his climax. "Whoever interrupts the conversation of others to make a display of his fund of knowledge makes notorious his own stock of ignorance."

The youth crept to the back of the shop, thankful that the reproof had not been accompanied by a stinging slap, and the master returned to his sale.

Mustapha Khan inquired whether it would be possible to get several *ghalimkars* of that kind in Ispahan, that he was really an agent for a foreign merchant and was collecting outstanding pieces of *ghalimkar* and embroidery, of silver and pottery and inlay work from all the larger cities in the country to send to Europe.

The merchant bethought himself of a very old urn in his home, one that plainly showed Chinese influence in the design and glaze, and which had come into his family so long ago he knew not by what circumstance.

Would the gentleman be interested in it? Yes, Mus-

tapha thought it might please the foreign employer, and he would be glad to come to the merchant's house to see it and save him the risk and trouble of carrying the heavy vase to the bazaar.

The drowsy rustling of the sycamore trees failed that night to lull the newcomers on the roof of the guest house. Farrukh had begged her husband to take her to the beautiful blue mosque, the Mosque of The King; to the ancient palace near it; and to the Palace of The Forty Columns. His explanation for not being able to take her and for desiring to gain immediate and intimate access to the merchant's garden recalled to Farrukh an incident which had occurred that morning.

"The governor's daughter took me to the bazaar to see the curious and beautiful things which are made here," she said. "While we were loitering along the silk shops, I met the man and woman we saw at Mehmi. The man had a string of donkeys laden with wheat, do you remember? And they were so poor and ragged in appearance. But today they were dressed in fine clothes and looked very prosperous. Is that not strange? Oh, yes! I am sure they are the same people, though they did not have the baby with them. I recognized the man's face and the woman's club foot.

"I was curious to know more about them. So I convinced the governor's daughter that we should follow them. Before you go to see the merchant tomorrow, I wish you would let me show you their garden."



XX

A LEAP IN THE DARK

Strangely coincident with his own direction was the course Farrukh pointed out to her husband next morning. When she stopped before a great gate, a massive panel of solid walnut, Mustapha Khan identified it unmistakably as that of the merchant Roshan.

“But that is no new discovery,” he lamented. “The Chief of Finance here tells me they have traced operatives to this garden many times, but never have they found any incriminating evidence during their secret searches.”

His ear caught the light patter of someone shuffling over the cobblestones just around the bend of the walled street. Discreetly he moved on, Farrukh a few steps behind. A woman, balancing on her head a broad tray piled high with handspun wool, hurried past on her way to one of the great rug weaving rooms of the city. Farther down the street, but still within sight of the merchant's door, Mustapha Khan stopped.

"While I tarry with the Chief of Finance a few minutes, you watch that gate and tell me whether anyone enters the merchant's garden." It was unwise to leave his young wife loitering in the street. His mother would reprove him for such laxity, but he could see no other way. It had to be.

In the official's garden around the next bend, he held close consultation. Then he came out, after reassuring himself that no one was passing to notice his presence, spoke a word to Farrukh, waited until she was out of sight, and then knocked at the gate.

"Who is it?" came the quick, guarded query.

"A customer to see your master about his antique vase."

He was expected. The gate was opened without further delay and he was escorted to the men's quarters. On the flower-bordered path he met a foreign woman who was just leaving the garden. At the verandah he deftly removed his slippers and entered the door where the merchant stood to greet him.

Host and guest exchanged polite salutations and entered the room. Mustapha Khan glanced quickly about. At each end a low doorway hung with draperies opened into adjoining rooms. The wall opposite the entrance was arched with many niches that held exquisite bits of pottery. On the flat wall spaces were *ghalimkar* treasures—old, old designs on prayer mats so fragile it would have been almost sacrilege to spread them on the ground and prostrate oneself upon them in prayer.

The merchant followed his glance sharply, but was thrown off his guard by the involuntary smile of appreciation and pleasure which lit up his guest's face.

"You are indeed a connoisseur to see any worth in my few, poor baubles. If any of them please you, they are a present to you," Mirza Roshan waved his hand vaguely about the room.

"Your kindness is very great," Mustapha Khan politely assured him, and seated himself on the carpet to await the tea and water pipes, which servants were bringing into the room.

To the accompaniment of the *qalian*, which gurgled noisily and sometimes almost chuckled as he puffed it, Mustapha Khan described as best he could from casual observation the rare objects he pretended to have assembled from all parts of Persia for his exacting master.

"With your permission," the merchant spoke up, "I will bring out the vase which I mentioned yesterday. It is in the next room."

As he arose from the floor, a commotion of shrieking and screaming at the foot of the stairs drew both men to the window. A ragged beggar stood trembling before a cluster of servants, pinioned in the arms of the brawny gatekeeper. On the cobblestones, where he had dropped them, lay Mustapha Khan's own shoes.

Mirza Roshan was aghast.

"My face is black!" he exclaimed in painful embarrassment. "You are a guest in my house, and my servants allow a thief to sneak in and steal your shoes!"

"May I be your sacrifice, master, but how did he get in?" the gatekeeper asked, fearful of having failed in his duty. "I was at the gate all the time."

"How did he get in? That is your business to discover." The master spoke harshly. "Excuse me for a moment," he altered his voice slightly as he spoke to the guest, and hurried down the steep steps to call a policeman for the thief. But the thief twisted and jerked, wrenched himself loose, and darted into one of the outbuildings, Mirza Roshan and the servants close on his heels.

Mustapha Khan looked about him swiftly, listening intently at each doorway. Mirza Roshan had started toward the right hand doorway; he would take the other. He lifted the drapery.

The room was empty, save for carpets and cushions—probably a sleeping room. He pushed back more draperies and found himself in a small room that was os-



Caught in a trap he seemed to be

tensibly furnished for cooking. A built-in Russian stove occupied one side. On the other was a bin of camel thorn twigs and charcoal. The deep wall niche was filled with pots and kettles. But the walls of the room showed no trace of smoke and the kettles were dusty.

If the room was not used for cooking, why—why—? But the time for conjecture was past. A knock at the street gate, the voice of the policeman issuing orders, footsteps on the stone stairs, and Mirza Roshan was calling his name! Mustapha Khan had no time to return to the reception room. He had barely a moment to stride through a small doorway in a far corner of the room into a darkened passageway. Dimly he discerned stairs. He felt his way to the bottom, thankful that he was still in stocking feet, and stood there panting as he heard Mirza Roshan's voice coming nearer.

Caught in a trap he seemed to be, for he now realized that he was in one of those darkened rooms where men sometimes drank their tea in summer, a room whose only entrance was the concealed stairway and whose only exit was a tiny, enclosed courtyard. He could not return the way he had come. He could not go into the courtyard, for the windows of the room above commanded it fully. He stood there, panting like a trapped animal. Then he saw a tiny door in the wall of the courtyard close by the doorway of the darkened chamber. It was his only chance of escape. Whether Mirza Roshan might be looking out the window into the court-

yard below or whether his glance might be directed elsewhere at the moment, Mustapha Khan could not know. He only knew that he got the door open, squeezed himself through the small opening, and closed it again before anyone called out to him.

But where was he? The adventurer considered. Had he escaped to safety or into greater danger? Then he remembered the official's embarrassed remark. On one side of the merchant's garden dwelt the official himself; and on the other, the rich foreign woman.

Very well! If he was in the official's garden, he was safe; if he was in that other, then he must use his wits. Nervously he thrust his hands into his pockets and desperately formulated one explanation after another for his presence here. His fingers caught at a tiny trinket he had purchased the previous day for his wife.

That a communicating doorway existed between the gardens of the suspected merchant and the customs official was most unlikely. That a connection existed between the merchant and the foreign woman was barely possible. And yet, he recalled, it was a foreign woman—*the* foreign woman?—he had met on the pathway in the merchant's garden. If her husband was dead, why did she stay on in a foreign land? The motive which would compel her to remain must be powerful indeed.

Blinking like an owl, Mustapha Khan stood there in the dazzling sunlight of a beautiful garden. No one was in sight, except a fat, naked baby, obviously a ser-

vant's child, who dabbled at the water in a shimmering pool. Seeing the stranger, he cried out and toddled down the path toward the gatehouse. The child's cry of fear brought both parents running.

The gatekeeper stopped abruptly.

"Who are you? Give the pass!"

The password! So that was it! Mustapha Khan thought rapidly. The foreign woman *was* involved in the merchant's private activities and her garden was closely guarded.

The young man spoke boldly, though his heart raced like a trip hammer.

"The password!" he repeated disdainfully. "I use no password; my face is my pass. You will do well to recognize me next time. I am the chief. I come here seldom, but you should know me. Such insolence from you another time and you shall 'eat the sticks.' "

A sudden, sharp rap on the gate followed the last word. The servant questioned the one who knocked. It was the mistress. He opened the gate. The woman who entered was the one whom Mustapha Khan had met on the merchant's garden path.

"And what have we here?" she asked coldly.

Before the gatekeeper could reply, Mustapha Khan addressed her in his best French.

"I am called Mustapha. I am a peddler. I carry trinkets from town to town for those who are interested in such things. I was told Madame might be interested in

a certain little curio I have. Would you like to see?" He smiled invitingly.

"What is it?" the woman asked curiously, surprised by the man's unexpected use of the foreign tongue.

"A scarab carved in jade," he explained, drawing the object from his pocket and laying it in the palm of her hand.

The woman glanced at the trifle. It was a mediocre piece of work. Her own collection included several specimens that were worthy of a museum setting. She tightened her lips scornfully.

"If that is the sort of thing you peddle, don't come here to bother me. My gatekeeper will not admit you again. Now, be off!"

Fearing the gatekeeper's reference to his mysterious entry, Mustapha Khan himself pulled open the gate and fled, still in his stocking feet, into the street. In the broad thoroughfare he quickly picked up a carriage.

"To the Department of Finance," he told the driver. "And an extra *kran* for speed."

The carriage drew up shortly before an open gate, where the national flag indicated a government office.

The conference which followed brought together all those persons who were employed both officially and privately by the bureau of internal revenue. That Mirza Roshan's garden was but an anteroom to the real smuggling headquarters, and that the foreign woman was intimately associated with the leaders, were their unani-

mous conclusions. Together they planned to the smallest detail a surprise attack on the heretofore unsuspected garden.

With the hour fixed, and the part each one was to play carefully outlined, the group were about to disband when Mustapha Khan, who had been sitting quietly by without taking part in the plans, spoke.

“May I be your sacrifice, but this woman is a *feranghi* and subject to a foreign government. Would it not be wise to procure from Teheran a special warrant signed jointly by the Chief of Police and her own consular agent?”

The chief bit his lip in vexation.

“You speak truly,” he said. “The old law has been set aside, but without such permission we might complicate matters and defeat our purpose. Yet delay also might be disastrous. If the woman were to become suspicious—” He pondered a moment.

“You, Abdullah Khan! You will go to Teheran on the airplane which leaves at noon. Get that signature if you have to work all night, and return on tomorrow’s airplane. Then we shall be ready to search the place by mid-afternoon tomorrow.

“Akbar Khan, you will arrange with our pseudo-beggar to take up a position near the gate and watch all activities at the *feranghi’s* garden.

“And you, Mustapha Khan—your strength is in hiding. Return to the governor’s garden and stay there,

even within the guest house itself, until I bid you come forth. What you have accomplished today must not be undone by carelessly showing your face in public. The woman might become suspicious; Mirza Roshan certainly must be, wondering why you disappeared so precipitately.

“Ah, that reminds me! The poor fellow who tried to steal your shoes will have to stay in jail until after the search tomorrow. I dare not send a note of explanation yet. Somewhere in the department there might be a clacking tongue.”

He who had been dispatched to Teheran hastened to the Ispahan airport and boarded the airplane. When it returned next day at noon and landed on the stony field marked by four stone pillars, the Chief of Finance was there to receive the warrant personally and begin the search without delay.

As he and his young aide turned to leave the field, they saw a motor car speeding over the sandy road toward the airport. From curiosity alone they lingered to watch the car stop and two passengers alight. The man carried two small pieces of luggage for a smartly dressed woman. Together they walked to the airplane and the woman climbed inside with her two bags. The airplane taxied down the field and was soaring into the blue before the Chief suddenly came to his senses.

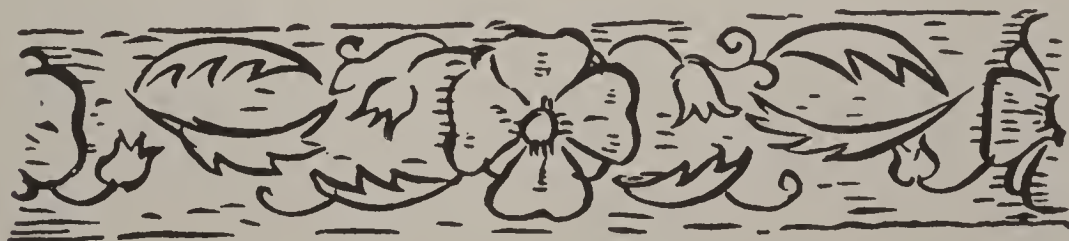
“By the Beard of the Prophet!” he roared. “That woman was none other than the *feranghi* we’re after!

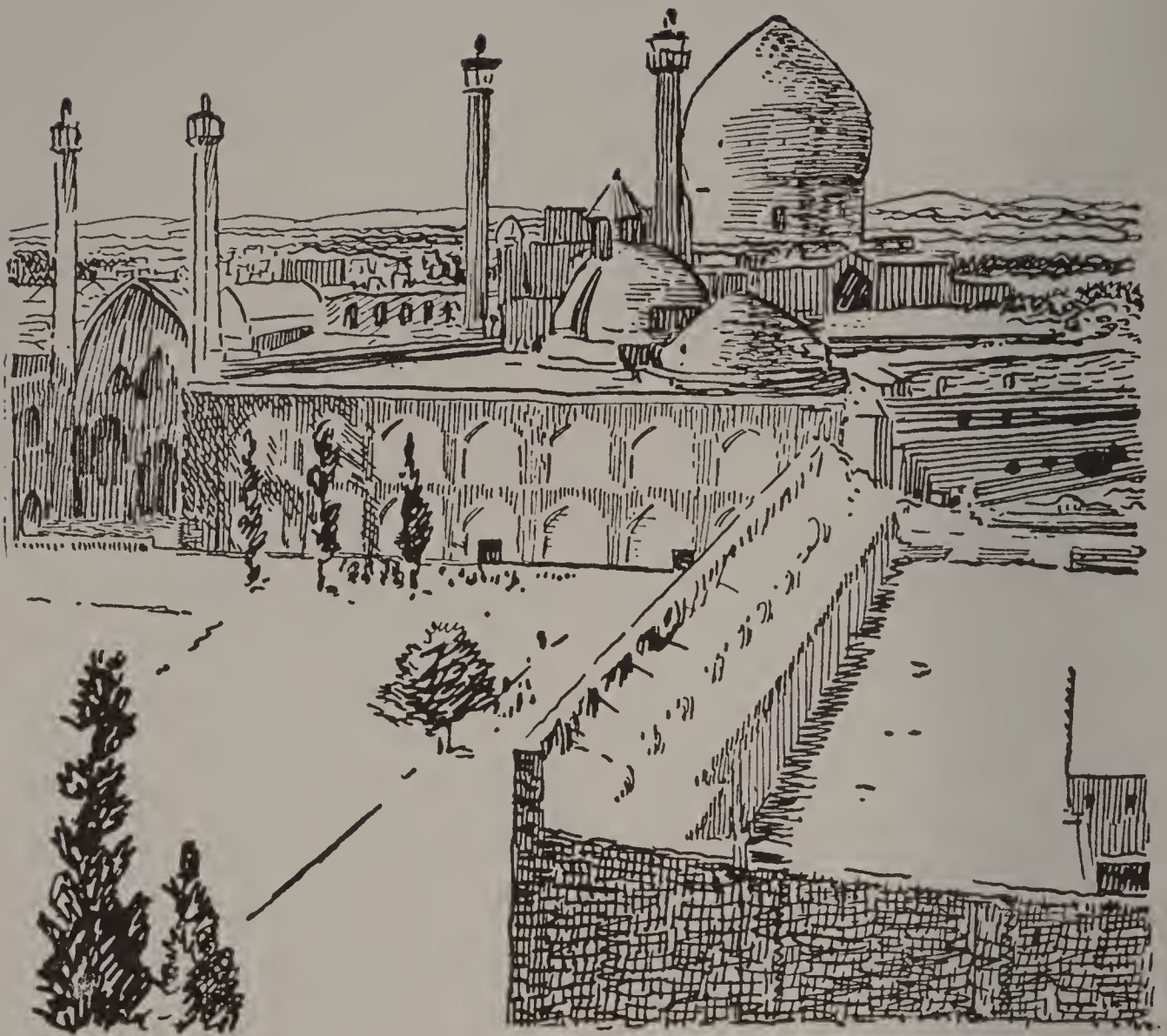
Those foreigners look so much alike I failed to recognize her at first.

“While we sit around waiting for warrants, she rolls up her tent and flees. As the poet says, ‘The sincere publican has proceeded on foot; the slothful Pharisee is mounted and gone to sleep.’ We thought the airplane would be fast enough for us, but she has beaten us. And when she lands, it will be in Baghdad and we can have no jurisdiction over her.

“We’ll go ahead and search the garden, but I daresay everything has been removed. Mirza Roshan must have communicated his suspicion to her. But what will she do in Baghdad? Where will she go from there? The least—and the most—we can do is to have our agents shadow her.”

So the baffled official returned to his desk to prepare a code message for one Hakim, who dwelt in Baghdad and followed at times the profession of miracle doctor, dervish, or boatman on the Tigris—professions which brought him into contact with sailors at the gulf, travelers in caravanserais, and persons who dealt in the traffic of opium and other drugs.





XXI

NEWSPAPER NOTES

The necessity for secrecy and seclusion being now removed, Mustapha Khan was able to go abroad freely and spend some time with Farrukh enjoying the many sights of the city.

There was much they wished to see; the old seventeenth century palace of Ali Kapi, with its many beautiful mural paintings; the great gate of the Royal School of Theology, the *Madrassah-i-Shah Husein*, which is perhaps the finest example of the Persian art of tile

mosaic; the Royal Mosque, *Masjid-i-Shah*, with its state-ly minarets and vast blue dome, of perfect proportions, flashing like a jewel in the sunlight. These and many other places they visited, but all too soon the sight-seeing was ended and the hour of departure had come. Far-ruk, who would gladly have spent another week at least in this beautiful city where all was new and wonderful to her eager eyes, regretfully closed the saddlebags, and a servant carried them to the car which waited in the street.

Servants and members of the governor's family stood about the gateway to speed the departing guests. Beg-gars in the street and curious passersby stopped to watch the excitement. Mustapha and Farrukh climbed over the door, which was held shut by luggage on the run-ning board, and tumbled into the back seat, while two other passengers found seats in the same unceremonious manner. The chauffeur settled himself in place and started the motor. A chorus of farewells arose from the crowd.

"May you be blessed in the journey!"

"You came well!"

"May God's protection go with you!"

Suddenly a raucous sneeze burst from someone in the crowd.

"Have patience!" one of the passengers urgently cried, as he laid his hand on the chauffeur's arm. "Let us wait. It is an ill omen, that one sneeze."

"Yes, yes!" Another corroborated the assertion. "My grandmother always warned us never to proceed with whatever we might be doing if someone sneezed once in our presence."

The embarrassed one sniffed and snorted and struggled with spasmodic breath. At last he accommodated the travelers and relieved himself of a second volcanic sneeze.

The spell was broken.

"*Hosh bi hallat!* Good for you!" his neighbor yelled and slapped the man gleefully on the back. The crowd burst into laughter, relieved that evil had been averted.

At last the travelers were off, moving slowly through the streets, for already the thoroughfares were crowded with camel caravans and strings of donkeys bringing their bales of rugs and bags of wheat to the great caravanserais.

Where the way emerged through a broad gateway to the open road, the chauffeur stopped the car. A police-soldier stepped up and took the chauffeur's card and the travel permits of all the men passengers.

"Whose is she?" he nodded inquiringly toward the veiled woman in the back seat.

"She is my weakness," Mustapha Khan replied matter-of-factly.

The officer took the credentials and went inside his little shelter, painstakingly read the name, father's name, place of residence, of each passenger; scrawled an indeli-

ble signature on the back of each permit and returned the papers to the occupants of the car.

Now they were on the open road. For a few miles they passed orchards already heavy with fruit. Along the numerous irrigation streams they saw rows of scrubby willows, whose tops had been cropped for firewood. Looking back, they beheld Ispahan only as a waving mass of gray-green, studded here and there with gleaming turquoise domes.

Then the desert stretched monotonously before them, glittering white and hot. Mustapha Khan pulled from his pocket a folded newspaper which a messenger had hurriedly given him at the governor's gate. It was the *Baghdad Times*, printed on one side in English and on the other in Arabic. Mustapha Khan read it with interest—all the happenings in the Iraq government, business conditions, financial news, recent European arrivals via the desert transport, social events in the foreign and official circles, items from Persia and India and even a few from Europe, and then one small note which the editor admitted was pure rumor, but interesting nevertheless.

"It is rumored," the lines ran, "that a mysterious ship lies somewhere in the Persian Gulf waiting for a large consignment of smuggled opium. Its illicit cargo is supposedly destined for international markets."

So brief and yet fraught with what significance!

Mustapha Khan read the lines again, noted the date

of the paper, calculated days and miles and rate of travel over caravan trails to the gulf. This ship, then, was the destination of the Hamadan consignment! But had it reached its destination without interference? What about the men at Bushire? Had they been vigilant? Or, had they closed their eyes and lined their pockets? And the foreign woman now safe in Baghdad, had she seen the newspaper story and had she laughed over her success?

Aware of his companion's intent look, he relaxed his grip on the paper, smiled, and turned to the English print, where he slowly translated phrase by phrase the information he had been reading on the reverse side.

"May I be your sacrifice," the stranger apologized politely. "I know the saying: Never ask a traveler his destination, or a person his business, or anyone his religion. But I could not help noticing your excitement. I presume that you were reading what I glimpsed in your paper—about the marvelous excavations which are being conducted at Persepolis. I have just come from there and I am overwhelmed by it."

"Truly?" Mustapha Khan remarked in surprise. As a schoolboy he had read of the ruins of Persepolis and was familiar with the legend told in every household of how Iskandar Rumi—Alexander the Great—had burned the palace there. But the few people who had ventured from the city of Shiraz to the deserted Persepolis in recent years had come back with disappointing accounts

of broken pillars and stones half buried under the shifting sands of the desert.

“What have the excavators found?” he asked.

“Such treasures they have uncovered,” the man declared, “as have been found nowhere else in this part of the world.”

Mustapha Khan settled himself comfortably to hear the story of the traveler from Persepolis.





XXII

THE DERVISH'S TALE

Mirages, hot winds, and clouds of dust accompanied the travelers to Sultanabad. Still, the journey was not uncomfortable. But beyond Sultanabad the touring car went no further. Engine trouble developed a short distance outside the city. At the garage it was discovered that a vital part was broken and that two days would be required to make the repair. So, the following morning, Mustapha Khan visited first one caravanserai and

garage after another in search of a car or truck which would take two more passengers.

It was nearly noon when they finally set out in an open truck—the chauffeur and Mustapha Khan in the seat; a road guard on the running board trying to keep his balance and hold his rifle at the same time; a youthful mechanic on the roof; and ten passengers, including Farrukh, sitting cross-legged on the floor of the truck in intimate company with two bales of rugs, a sack of mail, two water jugs tied to the side, and several melons which persisted in bouncing against their feet at the imminent risk of bursting open with each impact.

Frequent stops retarded their progress until the setting sun cast its blinding rays full in their faces as at last they drove into Daulatabad, still sixty-five miles from Hamadan.

Several of the passengers had reached their destination and started off down the dusty street; others sought the nearest caravanserai; Mustapha Khan and Farrukh made their way across the square toward the hotel, a crumbling, mud-walled structure little more inviting than the caravanserai.

Built flush with the street and opening inward on a straggling garden in the rear, the building required a narrow passageway through its center to reach the entrance. Before Mustapha Khan and his wife could reach this passage, they found their way blocked by a crowd of men and boys.

“What is it?” Farrukh asked quickly, as she held her veil closely over her face.

Clad in a ragged, brown robe with only a frayed rope for a girdle, a barefooted dervish was gesticulating to the crowd. His long, gray hair and beard were tinged at the ends with henna, sure evidence that his last bath had been in the far distant past. He held on one arm an ancient battle-axe, the symbol of his profession, and a chain suspended from which was an iron, boat-shaped dish for holding alms.

“Obey those above you. Give alms to the needy. Look not with envy upon the property of others, for that is a sin.” Thus was he preaching to the people.

“Come, come! O, holy man!” cried one of his hearers. “Give us a story.”

“A story! a story!” the crowd took up the words.

The dervish looked over the group, calculated its financial worth, twisted the chains of his alms-gatherer, and began:

“Many years ago, beyond the memory of you who sit at my feet, there dwelt in this city a man whose riches were as boundless as the stones of the field. Where this inn now stands, he built his mansion three stories high. The garden surrounding it was as beautiful as the gardens of Paradise. All day the water splashed from fountains and cascades into streams that fed a large pool in the center of the garden. From the highest balconies beautiful women dived into this pool and

swam about, gracefully disporting themselves on long summer days.

“Now the owner of all this splendor already had three wives, but he desired to take another—an unknown young girl about whose great beauty he had heard vague rumors. Two rug sellers had come to him with rugs and told of a wondrous beauty whose father had taken a garden outside the city for the summer.

“The rich lord sent one of the rug sellers as a go-between to the father with his offer of marriage and a request to know his terms. The newcomer, who had sent the rug sellers—his own agents—to the lord, had been waiting for this overture and was ready for the interview.

“‘What!’ he said, feigning great surprise. ‘Shall I give my daughter to a man about whom I know nothing? What is his family? His wealth? My child is not a village girl.’ And the go-between returned to his other client with word that the father was unwilling to give up his daughter, that he would state no conditions whatsoever.

“The lord, who was the biggest landowner of the province and whose family had great prestige, was enraged at this affront, and vowed that he would have the girl and have her, moreover, only as a concubine. But for weeks his schemings met with no success. The summer was nearly gone when the father finally agreed to discuss terms.

“The distance between his garden and the lord’s (it is that long, winding road which leads from this inn to yonder park on the hillside) must be carpeted with fine rugs, said the father.

“‘Let the trees on each side of the path leading from the street gate to the lord’s house be decked with rubies, pearls, and emeralds.’ Those were his very words. ‘My daughter will come over the carpeted path to her new home unattended at the hour before dawn.

“‘And let the street gate be left unfastened, that no one may see her until after she has entered the women’s quarters.’

“The bridegroom was aghast at these unheard-of conditions. But his go-between, the secret agent of the newcomer, slyly reminded him of the beauty and youthfulness of the bride. So, with much grumbling, he prepared to fulfill the conditions of the contract.

“A distance of two miles was covered with fine rugs, though the lord saw to it that they were narrow runners. The trees on each side of the garden path were decked with precious jewels. That night the lord lay awake, listening to the nightingale and thinking with ecstasy of his bride. The appointed hour drew near.”

Here the dervish paused. Cunningly he untangled the chains of his alms vessel and passed among the crowd.

“Alms!” he begged. “Give me of your bounty. If you like my story and would hear what happened to

the beautiful bride, then give me a coin, one of those coins that sag in your girdle. I am but a poor dervish, your slave, your sacrifice. Thank you, good man! Your kindness is very great. May you have a thousand years!"

And so he gathered in the coins, only a few and of small value. But they were sufficient for his needs.

"Go on! Continue!" the crowd cried, impatient for the rest of the story.

"The hour came and went," the dervish picked up the thread of his story. With the coins already in his vessel he made short work of the concluding words.

"Dawn brightened the eastern sky, but it brought a shadow to the heart of the bridegroom. For the trees had been stripped of their gems, the valuable rugs had disappeared, and the father of the fictitious bride and his two confederates had secretly left the city several hours earlier. Their whereabouts were so successfully concealed that neither the men nor the stolen goods were ever found."

A hearty laugh went up from the listeners, whose sympathies were none too great even for the rich lords of their own day. Then they began to clamor for fortune telling, bargaining for a foretelling at the lowest possible price.

Mustapha Khan and Farrukh had stood on the edge of the group listening to the story. At this point they pushed through the crowd toward the door.

"Make way, holy man! You are obstructing the path

of those who would go within, those who have listened long enough to your words.”

The dervish looked Mustapha Khan full in the face and calmly replied, “If the bat does not relish the company of the sun, the all-current brilliancy of that luminary can suffer no diminution.”

“Ho! ho!” chuckled the spectators, for here was another rich lord, being worsted by a simple fellow like themselves.

“Hold your tongue, fool,” Mustapha Khan retorted, nettled by the man’s impudence. From one of his equals, he would have received the quotation with an appreciative laugh, but not from one so lowly.

As he entered the half open door, he addressed himself once more to the dervish.

“It is also written: The ignorant man resembles the drum of the warrior, being full of noise, and an empty babbler.”

Flat tires, dirty gasoline, engine trouble that passed all understanding—“Ah, Mustapha, will we ever again see The Street of The Mulberry Trees?” sighed the weary Farrukh that night in their small hotel.

“Patience, my Jasmine! Patience, much patience. And then, at length, our reward.”

And with patience, much patience, so it was. The next night Farrukh was home again in her own garden. She reveled in its quiet beauty. Even the tart and critical remarks of her mother-in-law seemed incidental and

unimportant. As for Shokat, not a moment of that first morning would she leave her mistress; she must braid her hair; arrange her veil; bring her tea and sweets; be constantly in her presence.

"Ah, my Shokat," Farrukh exclaimed again and again, "I am indeed home at last, in my own home, where my baby shall be born, with you to look after him."

Shokat beamed.

"You—and Mas'udeh Khanoum," Farrukh added, mischievously.

The old family servant snorted. "That one! Nothing that I do can please her. I cannot sweep her rugs clean enough; I cannot grind the salt fine enough; I talk too loud. She will never permit me to touch the little one, if she has her way."

"It will be my baby, not hers," said Farrukh. "And do not forget the charm I brought you, my Shokat. Is it not to keep off the Evil Eye? And now be on your way. Tea and sweetmeats and melon seeds we must have in plenty today, for the neighbors will soon be here to offer felicitations on my safe return from the long journey."

Indeed, the noon meal was scarcely finished before the clacking of the gate knocker announced the arrival of callers. As each guest entered the house, she presented Farrukh with a large cone of sugar wrapped in blue paper—the customary gift for a returned traveler. While

the water pipe was passed around the circle, first one woman smoking it and then the next, Farrukh told them of the marvels of the great city of Ispahan, and Shokat moved among them constantly offering tea and sweets and busy-work. Later, Farrukh would return the calls and present to each woman individually a journey souvenir of value proportionate to her station in society.

When Mustapha Khan returned at sunset, after a day spent in the Department of Finance, he brought good news. From Ispahan had come to his chief a copy of the report that was being sent to the Minister of Finance at Teheran, and in it Mustapha Khan was mentioned favorably and given full credit for the delicate piece of work he had accomplished in that city. No indication was given in the report, however, of the way in which the department expected to make ultimate use of that information.

“If that ship in the gulf gets away with its cargo,” he said dejectedly, “our work will be for naught. Still, my commendation in this report will do much to remove the stigma that fell on my name by those arrests last spring. And the Chief can no longer say I have eyes only for my law books.”

That evening they sat on the carpeted bench in the garden and made plans for returning to the summer garden for another month. The air was heavy with the scent of jasmine and petunia. Faint splashing sounds from the Room of The Cascades reached their ears. The

poplars whispered in the soft breeze, recalling to them the more delightful breezes of their house in the hills. Quiet happiness, with but a single passing thought to mar its perfection.

Gently Farrukh touched her husband. "Suppose," she whispered timidly, "the little one is not a man-child, after all?"

Mustapha Khan placed his hand over hers. "Great happiness will be mine when the little one arrives," he said. "Happiness and much joy."





XXIII

WISHES FULFILLED

Shokat leaned over the cradle, scarcely touching the bright blue strips of iron that fashioned it.

"Mashallah! What an ugly babe!" she whispered softly, the admiration in her eyes and the pride in her voice belying the words she spoke.

Farrukh's baby, bound tightly in fine white swaddling clothes, lay sound asleep in the cradle, its hair as black and its features as fine as those of any other child in the realm. For Shokat to have exclaimed over the

beauty of this child would have invited disaster. It would have called the old *shatan's* attention to the child; the Evil Eye would surely have fallen on it. But no one would want, or even notice, an ugly child; it was much safer to pretend that the new baby was an ugly mite.

Six days had passed since the baby's arrival. During those six days and for four more days to come, friends watched the baby night and day so that no *jinn* would enter its body.

On the eve of the seventh day all preparations were complete for the celebration to which friends and neighbors had been specially invited.

Shokat lifted the baby from the blue cradle and held it across her lap as she sat on the floor. For six days its arms had been bound down to its sides. Now the *kulfat*, newly promoted to nurse, unwound the big triangles of white cloth which had bound the infant. Winding the babe again in fresh white cloths, she left its arms free but held the rest of its body firm in the many layers of cloth.

Farrukh held up a little round cap. The nurse placed a three-cornered scarf on the baby's head and then fitted the little cap over it. Then Farrukh crossed the ends of the scarf under the baby's chin and brought them up to the top of the cap and made a perky knot.

"Now the little one is ready for visitors," Farrukh smiled happily as she took her babe in her arms.

"Not yet, *khanoum!*" old Shokat fumbled in her

clothes as she spoke. "One thing more our little one must have!" she exclaimed, as she fastened a tiny blue bead in a lock of the child's long, black hair and pulled the charm down over its forehead.

"The Evil Eye shall not have a chance to harm this little one!"

The early arrival of guests at the gate put an end to the conversation.

"Hurry, hurry, nurse! Carry away these garments and bring in the water pipe and the tea and little cakes. The guests are arriving."

Farrukh laid the baby on a pillow on the floor beside her, smoothed the plaits of her short skirt, adjusted her fine white veil, and waited for the guests.

"*Salaam-n-aleikum!*" the women greeted her cordially, as they removed their street veils and settled themselves on the floor. They sat back on their heels, with their feet crossed under them, and leaned against the big wall cushions.

"We come to wish the steps of the new one blessedness."

"And is it true that the child is a girl? How unfortunate!"

"Never mind! The next one will be a boy."

The guests crowded into the room until Shokat despaired of serving the little cakes and the idle-time seeds without stepping on someone's tea glass.

"Let me hold the little one!" an old grandmother

cackled. "I had twenty babies myself and they all died but three. Most of them were winter babies. They smother under the *kurseh* or freeze outside it. You'll have a hard time with this one."

She picked up the bundle of warm, sweet babyhood and sang to it in a strong minor key:

*"Bacheh, Bacheh, Bar-i-Bacheh,
Allah nigah dar-i-Bacheh,
Nana bukhara az bar-i-Bacheh,
Baba benishinad sayayeh Bacheh.*

*"Baby, Baby, Fruit of the Baby,
God the guardian of the baby,
Grandmother eats the fruit of the baby,
Grandfather sits in the shadow of the baby."*

"Name the little one Maluk, Glory of The Kingdom," she concluded. Then she handed the baby to the woman sitting nearest her.

"Name the little one Azizeh, Beloved," the second singer suggested.

"*Baby, Baby, Fruit of the baby . . .*" each woman in turn held the child and recited the jingle. By the time it had traveled around the circle, the baby was crying lustily. Shokat, in the new role of nurse, set down her tray of sweets and carried the baby from the room. Its cries could be heard faintly in a distant part of the house.

"Oh, lady, but you are young and inexperienced!"

cackled the old mother of twenty children. "Let me give you some advice. Put a little opium under your finger nails and let the baby suck it. You won't have any more trouble with her. She will sleep night and day."

"Or make some baby syrup," advised another experienced matron. "After the sap has been collected from the poppy pods, save the skins of the capsules. Boil these poppy skins with water and add a little sugar. Whenever the little one becomes irritable, give her a sip of the syrup. She will soon quiet down."

"It is well to make baby syrup every summer," spoke up a younger woman, who had two small children with her, "for you will always have a baby. And the older children like it, too."

When Mustapha Khan came to his wife's apartment several hours later, after all the guests had gone, he listened thoughtfully as Farrukh repeated the names which the guests had suggested.

"I like none of them," he said finally. "For several days I have been thinking of a name. I should like to name her Iran."

"Iran?" Farrukh repeated the word slowly. "Iran? The name of our country? But it is the custom—"

"Yes, I know," her husband replied. "The custom is to choose from the names proposed by the Seventh Day guests. But, Farrukh, let us not bind our child with all the customs of the past. Tonight, when I came in,

Mahmud's woman at the gate said the baby had cried a long time and she wanted to send you some baby syrup. I say no, no! Opium is the curse of our people, and that is one practice we shall not use on this child. Other customs may not be so harmful, and there are many we can disregard. Let us rear our little one with intelligence. Let us make her a true child of the new day.

"Are you willing to do this, Farrukh? Many women of your acquaintance—the older ones—will ridicule you. They will even predict horrible things for your child. Are you willing?"

"Yes, Mustapha, I will try," Farrukh answered with hesitation. "I shall not mind their ridicule. But your own mother, Mas'udeh Khanoum! She will be a thorn in the flesh. It is she I would fear."

The fear of Mas'udeh's scornful opposition, however, was short-lived. While winter held the city in its coldest grip, during the days of *Chahar-Chahar*, an order came to the Department of Finance for Mustapha Khan's transfer to Teheran.

The post which carried this order had been delayed many days by heavy snows which had blocked the mountain roads. Icy blasts had piled the snow in mammoth drifts on the plateaus and choked the narrow, walled-in passes until they were hopelessly impassable, and the weight of many snows had broken down telegraph lines. For two weeks Hamadan had been cut off

from the outside world. Then long-legged camels had struggled through with the precious mail sacks.

In the office of the Department of Finance, Mustapha Khan's colleagues were discussing his promotion. Why was he being thus honored? And why did the promotion come at this time?

"*Ch'ars konam!* What petition shall I make?" Mustapha Khan replied laughingly, with a shrug. "I know no more about it than the rest of you."

"It is this," the Chief explained. "You recall the report I received from Teheran, in which Mustapha Khan was commended for his work in Ispahan. Because of his discovery, other investigators were able to trace an enormous cache to Bushire. The smugglers must have realized that we had knowledge of their supply at Bushire, for that particular ship we suspected finally left the gulf, sailing away with only a small legitimate cargo. And we know positively that the intended cargo is still somewhere near Bushire."

Farrukh heard the news with joy and regret and fear intermingled: joy in Mustapha's excitement and the prospect of living in the great capital city. Regret that she must now go so far from her family, and fear that she must make her home among strangers, in a place where everything would be so different from all that to which she was accustomed.

The fear was intensified when Shokat flatly refused to go along. "Two days' journey! Two whole days in

a fast-moving *mawsheen*. Why, that would take one to the end of the earth, *degair!* No. I return to Tuhistan."

"But you must come with me for a time," Farrukh begged. "I shall know no one in that great city. And you would not want a stranger to care for the little Iran, would you?"

Tears rolled down the cheeks of the old *kulfat*. Another nurse for her adored one? Ah, that it should be! But she held steadfastly to her decision. "No, no, no!" she cried. "The years have brought me no love for new places. I return, return to Tuhistan."

And with frenzied energy she turned to the packing of mattresses, quilts, samovars, trunkfuls of shawls and other clothing, the bridal beauty box and mirror, the silver dishes and spoons, the engraved tray from Ispahan—all the odds and ends of living that must now go to the new home, so far away.

"May your way through life be bright!" cried Farrukh from her heart, when at length the day came for their departure.

"Your mercy has been great," replied Shokat. "Would that your way and mine were one! And may Allah's protection go with you and the master and the little one, even to Teheran."



XXIV FORWARD STEPS

Whether a visit to a remote planet would have aroused greater wonder in the mind of the village bride than the strange sights which fascinated Farrukh on her arrival in Teheran, it would be difficult to say.

The broad, abandoned moat that edged the city walls, the gleaming glazed tiles in the towering Kazvin Gate through which they entered the city, the broad straight streets which crossed at right angles without a twist or turn, and the houses which boldly faced the street, un-

sheltered by garden and front walls, brazenly inviting passing scrutiny—all this amazed Farrukh.

But when she beheld women on the street with unveiled faces, without, indeed, even a street veil across their shoulders, her amazement grew to consternation.

“What kind of place is this,” she asked her husband fearfully that evening, “where women allow men to see their faces? Why are not those bold creatures put off the streets?”

Mustapha Khan was puzzled. How could he explain the laying aside of a custom which for centuries had been part of the Mohammedan woman’s life? Part of her life? No, not only part, but the very symbol of Mohammedan womanhood.

“This is but one evidence,” he said finally, “of the many forward steps which our people are beginning to take under the present Shah. Those unveiled women were respectable; and they were Persians, not foreigners.”

“But the Koran! the Prophet!” Farrukh exclaimed. “They say that women must be protected. I should be afraid to have men see my face. It is not right.”

“Yes, women must be protected, Little Jasmine. But I don’t think the Prophet meant merely that they should be protected by a veil.

“The presence of many foreigners in our capital, and the influence of high officials whose wives return from a sojourn in Europe without their veils, have had much

to do with fostering this new freedom. Even the Shah himself favors the unveiling of women. And I should not be surprised if it were first permitted and then required throughout the kingdom before many more years have passed."

As they set out in a *droshky* on the second day in this amazing city to inspect the new home, Farrukh wondered fearfully whether it would be one of those *feranghi* houses, two stories high of kiln-fired cream brick built close to the street without the protection of a garden wall. So it was with relief and joy that she heard Mustapha Khan order the driver to stop before the gate of a walled-in garden near the Yusefabad Gate.

She held her baby close, as she stepped from the carriage and waited at a respectful distance while Mustapha Khan knocked. A long conversation with the gatekeeper ensued. The servant wanted to assure himself first that the strangers were entitled to enter the garden. Then he threw open the gate.

Towering cypress and spreading *chinar* trees gave the garden a beauty unfamiliar to the eyes of the Hamadanis. The garden itself centered in a large, oblong pool elevated about a foot above its surroundings. Around it were the outlines of flower beds and paths in geometrical arrangement, and groves of trees in artless grouping.

These, the all-important features, Farrukh noticed first. Then she looked beyond, toward a long, low, trailing house whose every room—except, perhaps, the

kitchen—opened onto a long recessed verandah. The three walls of the verandah were finished with a fine, white plaster and broken at regular intervals by long windows that reached to the floor. These swung inward and served equally well for doors.

The first room the visitors entered was long and spacious. A ceiling of palest green caught Farrukh's attention at once. Hand-carved in the delicately tinted plaster was an exquisite design of garlands of blossoms and slender, curving leaves. Farrukh was entranced. Mustapha Khan smiled.

"And what does this recall?" he asked.

"The palaces of Ispahan," she answered slowly, reminiscently. "The palaces of Ali Kapu and Chihel Setoun. Their walls and ceilings were covered with it. I never dreamed, when I saw those panels, that I might some day actually live in a house with such beauty."

"We are indeed fortunate," Mustapha Khan told her. "Many other houses in Teheran and a few in Hamadan have this carved *gatch* decoration, but none, I think, has the equal of this.

"This particular work is comparatively recent. The house was built by a prince of the former dynasty only about fifty years ago, but it is a fine example of an art which flourished best several centuries ago.

"Many people today do not appreciate it. And in the ruined city of Rei, where a large wall section of it was found, the workmen broke up the plaster and melted off

the gold leaf with which the design had been picked out."

"Shall we really dwell in this beautiful place?" Farrukh questioned, hardly daring to believe that the lovely house and enchanting garden were really to be theirs.

"I signed the contract yesterday," Mustapha Khan assured her, "a lease for one year. Later, perhaps, I may buy it, but that will depend on many things."

Farrukh counted the rooms and windows, estimated the floor space, and planned the arrangement of the rugs. Then she inspected the kitchen.

Festoons of smoky cobwebs clouded the corners and ceiling. Dust lay thick in the niches. A bulky Russian stove displayed broken tiles urgently in need of repair. Farrukh moved about gingerly to keep the baby safe from contact with the dirt.

"What an abode!" she exclaimed. "A reception room fit for a prince and a kitchen fit for the dogs! It is unbelievable! Mustapha, where shall I find servants in this strange city? This one room alone will require an army to clean it."

The gatekeeper, who had followed them from room to room, now spoke.

"May I be your sacrifice, but no one else looks at the kitchen when they examine a house. The reception room is what matters most. But tomorrow I will send my woman and the girls to clean it. You shall see!

"And I can easily find servants for you, the best in

the city. My uncle is a gardener; he is even now looking for employment. My brother for many years was a cook and would cheerfully give up his present work to return to the pots and kettles. And my oldest daughter I would gladly permit to enter the *khanoum's* service as a *kulfat*. She is old enough to be married, but I have no dowry for her. It is a pity! But she is a good worker, and she could care for the little one," the man concluded shrewdly, as he observed Farrukh shift her bundled baby to the other arm.

"He is almost too helpful," Farrukh commented under her breath to her husband. The gatekeeper had turned to open another door for them. "But what can I do? I must have someone immediately."

Mustapha watched the man go into the next room.

"He must at least be dependable, else the owner would not have kept him here as caretaker when the garden was unoccupied."

"But would his daughter be neat and clean? I would not have her touch my baby if she were otherwise. O, would that old Fatima had come with us!"

The gatekeeper returned from his little excursion, led them through other rooms and back to the beautiful reception room. There they lingered a moment and then started toward the door.

"Go into the street and call a *droshky* for me," Mustapha instructed the servant, and soon he and Farrukh were riding back to their temporary abode.

Mustapha Khan then betook himself to the Department of Finance, where various underlings examined his credentials officiously before they reluctantly admitted him to the *Rais*, the Head of the Department. With the *Rais* was the Director of Internal Revenue. Ceremoniously the *Rais* summoned a servant to bring tea, politely inquired details of the journey from Hamadan, and eventually arrived at the purpose of the conference.

Mustapha Khan, he explained, had been recommended to him as one who was absolutely trustworthy and who had already untangled many a knot for the department through his skill and insight. Then he continued:

“Such a man the Director of Internal Revenue needs at this moment to assist him in a delicate piece of work. He has maps and plans of the department, reports of officials in every province, and communications from various foreign representatives of the Committee on International Opium Control, as well as several intercepted code messages of the smugglers. All these will be at your disposal. You are to study them carefully. Then you will be ready to assist him in the plan he has just outlined to me.”

In the succeeding days Mustapha Khan pored over all the director's papers. Then he turned his attention to steamship sailing notices, freighter schedules, and the history of certain vessels and their officers. He studied

the personnel of numerous importing companies in Europe and America and of manufacturing and exporting companies in India and Iraq. And he discovered some surprising facts. . . .

Farrukh had scarcely removed her veil when the gatekeeper's daughter appeared, ready for an interview with her prospective mistress. She was short and fat and had a pleasant smile. And she was clean!

"Praise the Lord!" Farrukh murmured to herself.

The girl Esmat assured Farrukh that she had helped care for her four younger brothers and sisters and that she was competent to care for the baby. Whereupon Farrukh handed the little Iran to her at once, glad to be relieved of the unaccustomed, exacting task.

With a nurse in charge of the baby, Farrukh was now free to make the round of calls which is expected of any newcomer. She had also to visit the shops and purchase all the articles needful for the new home, those which had not been brought from Hamadan—dishes, tea glasses, pots and kettles, water jugs, storage jars, and staple foods. Her mode of life was not to be altered appreciably by its city environment.

But first she must call on the wives of Mustapha's official acquaintances. That was imperative. As a protest to the shocking practice of other women who went about unveiled, Farrukh held her *chuddur* more closely than ever about her face each time she went into the streets of this bewildering, great city.

Not yet ready to accept the idea of unveiling, Farrukh was nevertheless eager to adopt many of the other innovations to which other women were already accustomed. On paying her first call in official circles, she was not given an opportunity to remove her shoes at the door; and on entering the room, she was invited to sit on what seemed to her a large wooden frame. A Morris chair, her hostess called it, and it was one of a small squad of cushioned chairs which flanked one side of the room.

Stiffly perched high in the air, Farrukh was uncomfortably conscious of her shoes and wished with all her heart that she could sit on the floor with her toes tucked inconspicuously beneath her. The older woman must have guessed her unfamiliarity with things foreign.

"You have just arrived in Teheran?" she asked.

"Just a few days ago. We have a garden near the Yusefabad Gate, but the house will not be ready for several days yet."

"And you have no furnishings yet?"

"None, except the cushions and rugs we brought from Hamadan."

"Then let me tell you where to go. There is a carpenter in the Big Bazaar—one Ohannes, an Assyrian. He made my chairs, of solid walnut with an inlaid pattern across the top. When he delivers them to you, all that will remain to be done is to put cushions in your best saddlebags and use them in the chairs."

With all the zeal of one conveying good news, the woman then told Farrukh where and how to buy the furnishings for her new home, the dark little cubbyhole shops in the bazaar where one could get the best handmade window draperies, the strange gaudy shops on the imposing business street—the Islamboul—where the most surprising *feranghi* merchandise was to be had—pictures and clocks and dishes, silver knives and forks, food in tins, clothing—yes, even blouses that reached below the knee and were worn *without trousers!*

Without delay, Farrukh visited Ohannes, the Assyrian. And when the six new Morris chairs were finished, a *hammal* roped them to his back and carried them in three trips to the house near Yusefabad Gate. There they were arranged in a stiff row the length of the reception room, to the obvious delight of Farrukh and the great satisfaction of Mustapha Khan, who was happy that his wife could adjust herself so readily to her new environment.

“With such fine chairs, we could entertain the Shah himself!” he remarked jokingly.

“Truly?” Farrukh knew not where to draw the line of incredibility in this great city where so many strange things were happening.

“Ho! Ho! Little Jasmine! If you could see the beautiful Marble Throne or the gorgeous Peacock one encrusted with jewels, you would know that he would never come to our humble dwelling.”

So Farrukh learned new ways and discovered many new interests as the spring days lengthened and brightened, and the snow line retreated on the slopes of the Elburz mountains behind Teheran, leaving only Mt. Demavend, that Persian Fuji-Yama, sheathed in glistening white.

Farrukh had rapidly grown used to many of the strange manners of the capital, and now wanted to try the most daring. A small, six-mile railway ran from Teheran to the ancient suburb of Rei. Each year thousands of visitors made pilgrimage to Rei to visit the little shrine of Shah Abdul Azim. But few of them ever gave much attention to the dreary ruins of a civilization that dated back thousands of years.

Therefore, when Farrukh proposed to her husband that they make a *gardesh* to Rei, he enthusiastically consented to the plan. In his reading he had encountered references to the antiquity of Rei and was eager to see the remains of its ancient civilization.

Although a caravan road followed the same route as the railway, Farrukh insisted on riding the train and found the ride even more exciting than the motor car journey to Ispahan or a ride in the horse-drawn trolley cars of Teheran. True, the engine puffed black smoke which blew back into their faces, and the cars jerked and bumped. But what was a little discomfort compared to the privilege of riding in a house on wheels and at such great speed!



In many places the walls were fifty feet high

Arrived at the terminal, most of the passengers hastened at once to the shrine. Farrukh looked longingly toward its dome and minarets patterned in diagonal stripes of glazed tile, but she turned obediently toward her husband and followed him about the dusty ruins. After all, the train ride had been her real reason for making the trip. Making a pilgrimage had been only her excuse.

Mustapha Khan stepped warily over the ground and cautioned Farrukh to watch her step carefully, for the surface was marked by pits and wells, unexpected hollows, and the half distinguishable ruins of tombs and towers.

Remains of the wall which had surrounded the city were well preserved in various places. Outside the wall were evidences of the citadel with its walls of prodigious thickness and its fortress-like towers. In many places the walls were fifty feet high, and time and weather had not been able to obliterate the outlines of the sun-dried bricks which composed it. Everywhere within that desolate area were scattered bits of broken pottery.

Mustapha Khan eagerly searched for a choice fragment, a souvenir of this visit. In the loose soil near one of the great towers he unearthed it, a tiny clay bowl of iridescent hue which powdered his fingers as he touched it.

"Mashallah!" he exclaimed in wonder. "I did not expect to find anything like this. Why, it must be three

thousand years old! In a foreign museum I once saw a vessel which had this same flaky glaze. It was very ancient, and was protected in a glass case."

"How do you know that the bowl is so ancient? Perhaps Rei itself is not so old?" Farrukh questioned.

"Books of history tell us that it must have been a flourishing city twelve centuries before the Hejira. Tradition even says that it was founded by the first king of Iran about five thousand years ago. And it is a known fact that Haroun al-Raschid, that great ruler of Baghdad, was born at Rei less than a hundred and fifty years after the Hejira."

"What a lecture on history you have pronounced!" Farrukh exclaimed, when he had finished. "I am sure it is time for us to return to the railway. Indeed, I find the interior of the train much more interesting than these crumbling bricks and broken water jars!"

"Then it will give you something to remember and think about while I am away," Mustapha Khan announced abruptly. "This morning the Director and I felt that the moment we have been awaiting has arrived. All our plans have been carefully laid and need only a match to set off the powder. Tomorrow morning I am to take a special airplane to Baghdad, pick up a valuable passenger there, and go to Langeh on the Gulf. I shall have to remain there until the expected developments occur. I shall be gone only a few days at the most, but much will happen in that time."



XXV

THAT WHICH IS MUSK

While Hamadan lay buried under heavy snows and Teheran shivered in occasional flurries of snow, the terrific heat in Baghdad lessened and travelers rejoiced. Hakim, the miracle doctor of Baghdad, spent his days wandering from one caravanserai to another, writing prayers to ward off fevers, mixing black salve for the afflicted, reciting incantations to drive out devils, and

keeping his eye and ear ever alert for travelers who might have suspicious baggage.

"So you come from Kermanshah, master?" he would disarmingly project himself into a conversation. "They say great pictures are carved on the side of a mountain near that city. Have you seen it, the *Besitoun*? And where do you go, friend?"

"To Damascus, perhaps," the traveler answered sharply. "But it is said, 'Ask not a traveler his destination.' So, hereafter hold your tongue against such impertinence."

"Oh, master! I only wish to write a prayer for you—for an *anna*, of course; yes, or even for less, to carry you safely across the desert."

"Go lose yourself!" the other retorted angrily, and walked away.

Whether he met with rebuff or a smile or a jest in return, Hakim continued his questioning way. He wandered along the shores of the broad Tigris river, casually noticed the little launches chugging importantly up and down the stream, observed the melon men unloading their awkward, round *gufas*—basketlike boats made of ribs of the palm leaf, interwoven with flexible twigs and caulked watertight with pitch—and he watched the sun-burnt farmers patiently poling their inflated skin rafts.

One such raft was moored to the shore. Gaunt, sun-blackened laborers clothed only in white cotton pantaloons rolled to the knee, open shirt, and long turbans,

sang a rhythmic tuneless chant as they carried the cargo ashore.

"I am Hakim, the doctor," the spectator informed the laborers. "Have you any ills? I will cure your afflictions. My fame has traveled from the Tigris even unto the Euphrates."

"That is a great distance, uncle, but we travel farther," one of the men jokingly retorted. "We go from Baghdad to the Gulf."

"And what do you carry on that fine raft? Wheat?"

"Yes, we brought a great load of wheat from the south."

"And do you go back empty-handed?"

"Empty-handed when the current is with us!" the men scoffed. "Where is your vast wisdom, uncle? We take a heavier load when the current carries us along. This time we take twenty-and-four casks of rosewater."

Joking with the loaders, advising the fishermen, warning the donkey boys, entertaining the foreigners who came and went on the desert transport line, taking advantage of every opportunity to engage boatmen and camel drivers and travelers in conversation, old Hakim learned of every shipment of rugs and wheat, of cotton and tea and sugar, of outgoing perfumery from the makers of attar of roses, and the incoming stocks of soap and brushes and hats. These things, and more, Hakim learned in many weeks of vigilance.

Then, one day in early spring, a Persian official at

Langeh, the gun-running point on the Persian Gulf, lowered his field glasses.

"For forty days I have watched that ship," he announced, "and now I have my reward. They have kept up steam every day, but today they have put on more. They will sail shortly. Let us be off!"

The government motorboat cut the choppy surface of the water. With the official flag of red, white, and green fluttering importantly, it nosed straight for the shabby little freighter.

A command on deck cut the air. Hands reached for the rope ladder to jerk it up. Too late! The officers below had seized it. A knife flashed—to sever the cord. A shot splintered the rail. The officers were on board.

It was but the work of a moment to subdue the captain and crew. The gulf was guarded. They could not have hoped to make their escape.

"Where is it, the opium?" Agha Said Khan commanded. "I represent His Majesty's revenue service."

"We carry no opium," the captain denied the charge, "only the usual miscellaneous cargo. Search us, if you wish."

Everywhere the revenue officers searched for the drug—in the engine storeroom, in suspicious-looking petrol tins, under the coal in the engine room, around the boiler, under the sails, in the passengers' trunks and chests. They tested for false bottoms the palm-leaf baskets of certain passengers bound for Karachi, and they

examined the seams of the life-belts to note any recent stitching. All these common places of hiding they knew.

Then they turned to the cargo: rugs from Kashan for a London importer, casks of rosewater from a famous perfumer in Baghdad for his agent in Karachi, crates and goatskin bags of luscious golden dates from Shiraz for New York.

The search was slow and tedious, for only two men could be spared from guarding the crew. Several of the casks of rosewater were tested and sounded full of liquid; a random bale of rugs was unwrapped; a long, steel needle was thrust into each lot of dates, withdrawn, and smelled for the telltale odor of opium.

"Somewhere on board it is hidden," Agha Said Khan declared to his men. "We must look again, more thoroughly. We know—"

Splash! Splash!

"What was that?" the officer shot the words at the captain.

"I don't know. Probably the cook emptying his garbage."

"I thought you said all hands were on deck. The lieutenants saw no one when they made their rounds in the search."

While the others kept the crew covered, one official stepped to the rail. A wooden cask, no, two casks, bobbed on the water a few yards from the keel.

The officer nodded to the lieutenant. The latter pulled

a rocket from his pocket, set it up, and touched off a match. A ball of fire soared into the air and burst in a glory of color. Instantly a dozen motor boats shot out from the distant shore and converged toward the freighter. A half hundred soldiers and police were at hand within a very short time. Agha Said Khan relaxed his watch momentarily.

A swarthy fist knocked the gun from his hand. The lieutenants were covered. In a flash the crew and their two passengers swarmed toward the opposite rail, their gunmen backing away rapidly but warily. Over the rail they all dived, into the blue Persian waters, striking out for the shore line far from the city wharves.

When the reserve forces climbed on deck, they found only five nonplussed Persian officials roundly cursing one another for the blunder. However, in a few minutes they had pointed their motor boats toward the swimmers and were fishing them out one by one. A few had managed to escape, but their prize—the captain—had been too corpulent, too slow to outdistance his pursuers. This time the officers took the precaution to handcuff their prisoners. Returning to the freighter, they fished up the two wooden casks, left a small detachment on guard, and proceeded toward the shore.

A close examination of the casks disclosed a small, inconspicuous cross on each. They contained the opium, many pounds of the square, one-pound cakes.

A speedy trial of the captain resulted in a sentence

of two months' imprisonment and a heavy fine. By nightfall he was safely behind bars. The testimony of Hakim, whom Mustapha Khan had brought from Baghdad in readiness for the *coup*, revealed that the captain was well aware of the nature of his cargo, as were most of the crew.

On board the freighter the watchers were boisterously engaged in a game of dice. They had but to wait until a trustworthy crew was sent out by the company's agents, vouched for by the local port authorities. All the crew had escaped or been carried ashore as prisoners.

All the crew? What then could be that sound—half moan, half groan—that came to them from below deck? Was it a *jinn*? Had one of their number inadvertently stepped on an evil spirit in the dim lantern light? The moan floated nearer and nearer. It was behind them. They almost felt its warm breath on their necks. They hid their faces in their hands, and shrank within themselves, trying to make themselves invisible to the oncoming *jinn*.

"Peace be with you!" wheezed the voice.

Fearfully they looked up. It was a man, his face drawn and white—almost green—in the flickering light.

"In the name of Allah, take me to dry land."

"Who are you? One of the crew?"

The man trembled and hung his head.

"Why did you not try to escape with the others? Your life is worth less than nothing here."

"May I be your sacrifice, my life is almost gone, anyway. I am a Hamadani; I cannot swim. I have never been on the water before. This vessel rocks worse than a camel. I beg you! I implore you! Take me to the dry land, even though it be to jail." He staggered to the rail to relieve his seasickness.

For Abbas had helped bring the two specially marked casks on board at the last moment, and had had no intention of staying. His escape cut off by the arrival of the government officials, he had miraculously kept himself out of sight and daringly thrown the two casks overboard in an attempt to destroy the damaging evidence. But a few hours of the motion of the sea promptly brought him up on deck with a plea for mercy.

The Bureau of Customs now had its case complete, and the work of Mustapha Khan loomed large in the completed picture. Suddenly swooping down on operatives in many cities, the authorities rounded them all together and brought them to trial in Teheran.

There they were—a caravanserai owner from Tabriz, the Ispahan shawl merchant, a Bushire shopkeeper, a donkey driver of Kermanshah and his club-footed wife, the map-making colonel of Hamadan and his local underlings, and a thickset, heavily bearded man in thick glasses. All these and many more were caught.

The Teheran newspaper carried a long account of the spectacular *coup*. Great praise was given the Department of Finance for its cleverness and to the Bushire

and Langeh port authorities for their "extreme bravery in the face of great danger."

Mustapha Khan chuckled as his wife leaned against his arm and read the lines with him.

"From all that I heard," he said, "they were only a little braver than old Abbas. They merely had the advantage of a surprise attack and really did not make the most of it, at that!"

"Nevertheless, they succeeded and you have profited by their success," Farrukh reminded him.

"Yes, you speak the truth," Mustapha Khan conceded. "The Minister at Teheran would not have cared particularly or even known about my achievements, except for this seizure."

"And yet," Farrukh continued, "the poet says otherwise. That is musk which discloses itself by its smell, and not what the perfumers impose upon us:—If a man be expert in any art he need not tell it, for his own skill will show it."

"*Beh! beh! beh!* That was rare quoting, Farrukh! For indeed the opium was still opium, although the casks were labeled rose water."

"You mistake my meaning," Farrukh replied impatiently. "I am sure that the government would have recognized your achievements in time."

"And you, Little Jasmine, for all your learning, you still are unable to know when I am merely teasing you."

"You have such an eager, inquiring mind that you

have often been a helpful companion to me. And yet, at other times that same mind spins around like the jasmine petal in my teacup, and you are still only a pretty child. Which are you really, Farrukh?"

"Both," she smiled brightly, and pushed the newspaper away.

TAMAM SHUD



PERSIAN WORDS AND EXPRESSIONS

agha. Sir.

ajab. exclamation of astonishment.

aleph. A; first letter of the alphabet.

alhamdulallah. Praise the Lord!

Allah. God.

angoush-pech. Twisted Finger, or Finger Twist; a soft, divinity candy.

anna. two and a half cents.

arrak. distilled liquor.

askari. a species of grapes.

bah or beh. an exclamation with many shades of meaning.

bandeh. slave.

bazaar. a shop district.

bey. B; second letter of the alphabet.

Besitoun. location of ancient rock carvings.

Bismillah. "In the name of God." A pious utterance at the commencement of a journey, a meal, or a piece of work.

Chahar-Chahar. "Four-Four." Four days of midwinter.

ch'arskonam. an exclamation or retort indicating indifference, or inability to explain; literally, "What petition shall I make?"

charvadar. driver of fourfooted animals.

chash'm. "By my eyes!" an exclamation of assent.

Chihel-i-Bezurgh. The Big Forty; first forty days of winter.

chinar. sycamore or plane tree.

chuddur. long, semicircular robe—black on the street, colored indoors—worn by women.

Darreh. The valley; a ravine in the foothills above Hamadan.

dastmal. a square of cloth, or handkerchief.

degair. Indeed!

- dokan. small shop.
dozar. twice a 40 $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch measure.
droshky. phaeton-like carriage.
dugh. diluted clabber.
farsagh. three and a half miles; the distance a camel can travel in one hour.
feranghi. foreign, foreigner.
feranghistan. foreign parts.
gardesh. an outing, or stroll for pleasure.
gatch. a kind of plaster.
ghalimkar. block prints on cloth.
giveh. flat, heelless slipper with crocheted cotton top.
Gulistan. "The Rose Garden." A poetic work by Sa'adi.
gufa. a basketlike boat.
hammal. porter; one who carries burdens on his back.
Hegira. the flight of Mohammed from Mecca, A.D. 622.
Hosh bi hallat. An expression meaning "Good for you!"
Imams. successors to the Prophet.
Insh'allah. If God wills.
jevaz. police permit to travel from city to city.
jinn. genii of Arabian Nights.
kadkhoda. headman of the village; resident agent for land-lord.
khan. lord.
khanoum. lady.
kharbuseh. a species of melon.
Khuda bikunad. God grant that it may be!
kibob. small piece of skewered meat.
kishmish. the kind of grapes used for making raisins.
kismet. fate; destiny.
kran. coin valued at ten cents at par.
kulfat. maidservant.

kurseh. wooden frame covered by a quilt, under which is placed a pan of coals.

maidon. any open place.

Mashallah. literally, By God's will! Exclamation of pleasant astonishment or wonder.

masjid. mosque.

mawsheen. Persianized form of the word machine.

mast. clabber.

mirza. teacher; title of respect often bestowed indiscriminately on those who can read and write.

mobarak bashad. May it be blessed!

Muharram. month of mourning.

mullah. Moslem priest.

No Ruz. New Year's.

osh. a dish of diced vegetables with sour milk gravy.

pilau. steamed rice.

qalian. the water pipe.

qan'at. underground water channel for irrigation.

Rahim. The Compassionate.

Rahmon. The Merciful.

Rais. The head of the department.

sahra. desert.

salaam. peace.

salaam-n-aleikum. Peace be with you!

sang-i-sheer. the Stone Lion.

Shah Nameh. The King's Book; a poetic writing of Firdusi.

shatan. Satan.

sherbat. a refreshing drink of fruit juices.

shirinee. sweets; cakes or candy.

Tamum Shud. The end, or, It is finished.

taqcheh. niche in the wall.

tar. a stringed musical instrument.

tariak. opium.

toman. one dollar at par.

umbar. storeroom.

vakil. go-between; broker.

Yakh Chal. Ice Wells; mountain peak 14,000 feet altitude.

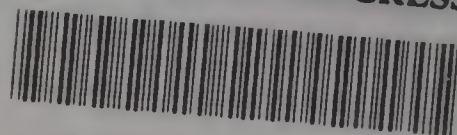
Yesmeh. Jasmine.

Persian dates used refer to the Mohammedan lunar calendar which dates from the Hegira A.D. 622.





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